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The Circle Always Grew: Folklore and Gay Identity, 1945-1960

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The Circle Always Grew: Folklore and Gay Identity, 1945-1960

Abstract

It has become a common place in Gay studies that the rise of Gay culture as we know it today has its roots in the years immediately following World War II. Using life history field techniques as a means of doing field research, the folklore of Gay men of this era is examined. Interviews were conducted with men who were out in the Gay world during the fifteen years after 1945. Biographies of the men are provided. Specific kinds of folkloric behavior are explicated including bar customs, nicknaming, parties, festival events and popular means by which men were able to identify one another as Gay and become part of the Gay community. The role folklore plays in the process of Gay identification is also examined. Historical context is provided for the era as it impacts the ways in which Gays were seen and the influence the Gay presence reflects the tenor of the times. Underlying concepts of Gay identity and community are given priority as a theoretical underpinning furthering understanding of the ways in which folklore is a necessary ingredient for both identity and community. It is demonstrated that any understanding of Gay men of that era must attend to their creative abilities in using folklore to carve a place for themselves in the cultural arena.

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**THE CIRCLE ALWAYS GREW:
FOLKLORE AND GAY IDENTITY, 1945-1960**

David S. Azzolina

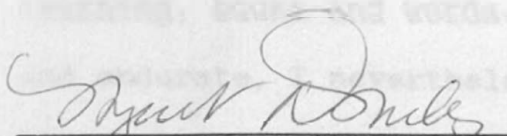
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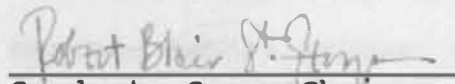
in

Folklore and Folklife

**Presented to the Faculties of the University of Pennsylvania
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy**

1996


Supervisor of Dissertation


Graduate Group Chairperson

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Of all the rituals and rites of passage of the doctorate, none is more satisfying than acknowledging the people who made completing the Herculean task possible. And let it be noted that no one I have ever met completes a dissertation gracefully. Anyway, if my observations of my friends are accurate, these pages may be the only ones of the dissertation that will get read (rightly, I might add), so I had better get it right.

People whose names will mean nothing to one another make clear the reality that our human lives are intertwined inextricably and inexplicably. So if Howard Becker is right in naming "Art Worlds," there is surely a phenomenon of a "dissertation world." The fact is the germination of ideas in this case goes back to my haziest memories of love of learning, books and words. From a family that was fractured and obdurate, I nevertheless learned a love of stories, storytellers, and storytelling. For Dallas Herbert and Matthew O'Brien who taught me against all odds, namely the Neptune school system, that the life of the mind mattered, profound thanks. For J. Bonner Ritchie and Edward Geary who demonstrated that dissonance was inherent in any thinking process, thank you for helping me grow up. For Bert Wilson, one of the few academics I have met whose life is a testimony of his mind, heart and soul, I owe more than I can

say. He was my first professor of folklore and set the standard which has never been exceeded.

Kenny Goldstein looms so large in my life that I am reduced to attempts at relevant metaphor. To me, he is like a giant redwood. Folklore as a discipline owes him so much and now the redwood has fallen. Peace and eternal love to him. Just a mere "my boy" from him could keep me going in moments of discouragement. When I originally asked him to supervise this dissertation, he thought it was because I thought he would be easy on me. The real reason, I explained, was that I thought of all the faculty, he was the only one who would understand and sympathize with what I was trying to do. He did understand and gave so much by the example of his life.

Other folklore teachers have also given so much. Dan Ben-Amos sets the highest scholarly measure by which women and men in all fields may measure themselves. His encouragement of me as an undergraduate and continuing interest in my career have been an important source when I have been discouraged. I hope I have not let him down.

Henry Glassie, unwittingly, provided a germ for this dissertation. His article "The Moral Lore of Folklore" convinced me that I had to do something with this exercise that mattered, even a little. My original goal in entering graduate school was to work among Australian Aborigines. Given my life circumstances, that was a bit too grand.

Settling for the merely doable seemed a waste of time. Henry's article provoked me to seek something else. Dear Henry, immensely inspiring and romantic, and, it must be said, slippery (sorry, Henry), has been one of the main influences on the way I see the world.

Other folklore teachers have led by example. Don Yoder, Roger Abrahams and David Hufford have taught me and led me to think in new ways. David, too, stepped in as the second reader at the last moment and was unfailingly available as my anxiety about finishing became, shall we say, difficult. Dell Hymes in his quiet way furthered my understanding of the connection between art and politics. Really, all of them have led me to think, period. There is, sadly, a crassness about academic life in our time and I must say that these teachers have helped me bear it with hope that some good might come of our endeavors.

Fellow folklore students, too, have nourished me in all senses of that word. At the risk of neglecting to name some of them, I must name Peter Tokofsky, Leonard Primiano, Bonnie O' Connor, Lael Weismann, Ted Mast, Debra Kapchan, Jenny Michael, Bill Westerman. All of them, and others, fed me. It has been my good fortune to know most of the folklore graduate students fairly well since I participate in teaching the library portion of Folklore 501. They have all heard me rant a bit about my work (and other less professional concerns) and have been unfailingly indulgent.

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Colleagues at Van Pelt deserve praise for their patience with me through this process. Providing me with moral support, computer support or just a kind word now and then has made all the difference. Jane, I simply cannot thank you enough. Your encouragement often made the difference between going on and giving up. Michael Simpson deserves special thanks for being patient when I suffered from computer panic.

George McGovern often quoted Yeats in his campaign which inspired me as a young man. No truer words were written than "Count where man's glory most begins and ends, and say my glory was that I had such friends." To Julie and Charles, Gordon and Karen, Bob and Karen, Cathy, Phillip, Stephen, Keith and Lou, Hugh and Michael, Brenda, Chris: if love for me makes what I do possible, and I believe it does, you are the ones who did this work. Glenn "The Captain" Lucas was always available, providing me a necessary anchor. My housemate Karen tolerated odd hours and a clogged mind, and gave me the gift of laughter. Benny Contreras got me through the photocopying nightmare. No small debt is owed him.

Through Bill and Lois I have met some people who have sustained me one day at a time for years and years: Harry, Dick, Willard, Jet, Sarah, Dorothy, Sheppard, David, Judy--

thanks for leading the way. Sharing our primary purpose, we all succeed.

Obviously, I owe an immeasurable debt to the men I interviewed. I felt very connected to many of them and though I did not like all of them, I will always treasure their willingness to spend time with me. Incredibly, two have already died, one of AIDS, the other of complications of being older. Wayne and Chris generously introduced me to some of their friends and were contagiously enthusiastic about the endeavor.

Thanks, too, to my father and Audrey. I only wish Helen and Sandy could have lived to see May 21, 1996. Thankfully, the joys of my life, Laura, Jennifer and Nicholas can. I hope they all can be proud.

Though much is taken, much remains and so I dedicate
this work and whatever good may come of it, to the gifts
left me by some of my dearest loves.

Thomas Angeloff May 22, 1954-June 27, 1995

Daniel Baross March 8, 1954-April 1, 1993

Kenneth Blaylock April 5, 1963-January 2, 1995

Gary Byrne April 23, 1947-October 17, 1991

Mark Small July 17, 1957-December 20, 1992

Michael Thompson January 14, 1938-March 24, 1989

Sometimes I think that I know what love's all
about...

I won't be ashamed of love...

Love lasts forever...

---Neil Young

If I mayn't speak about him to you sometimes, I
shall die.

---E. M. Forster

ABSTRACT

THE CIRCLE ALWAYS GREW:

FOLKLORE AND GAY IDENTITY: 1945-1960

DAVID S. AZZOLINA

MARGARET MILLS

It has become a common place in Gay studies that the rise of Gay culture as we know it today has its roots in the years immediately following World War II. Using life history field techniques as a means of doing field research, the folklore of Gay men of this era is examined. Interviews were conducted with men who were out in the Gay world during the fifteen years after 1945. Biographies of the men are provided. Specific kinds of folkloric behavior are explicated including bar customs, nicknaming, parties, festival events and popular means by which men were able to identify one another as Gay and become part of the Gay community. The role folklore plays in the process of Gay identification is also examined. Historical context is provided for the era as it impacts the ways in which Gays were seen and the influence the Gay presence reflects the tenor of the times. Underlying concepts of Gay identity and community are given priority as a theoretical underpinning furthering understanding of the ways in which folklore is a

necessary ingredient for both identity and community. It is demonstrated that any understanding of Gay men of that era must attend to their creative abilities in using folklore to carve a place for themselves in the cultural arena.

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CHAPTER 1: MERGING CIRCLES

"Ever the dim beginning,
Ever the growth, the rounding of the circle,
Ever the summit and the merge at last,"

--Walt Whitman, Leaves of Grass, "Eidólons," 8-10

A question is like a knife that slices through the stage backdrop and gives us a look at what lies hidden behind it.

--Milan Kundera, The Unbearable Lightness of Being, p. 254.

From the distance of fifty or a hundred years, events are made clearer because more data can be accumulated, alternative explanations explored and with some effort, a more objective stance taken. With recent cultural phenomena it is not possible to be definitive. For any viewer, the obstacle of the present to perception seems to be overwhelming. For most, it is impossible to separate reality from personal biases no matter how well-intentioned the observer may be. Even in the hard sciences experimenters must reveal their stance.

When a social issue is involved, it is essential that the writer make clear what is at stake. If the issues are small, perhaps the claims need to be as well; if large, then the reader must demand the writer make his point of view explicit.

The constellation of events surrounding the rise of Gay culture in the late twentieth century are too close at hand

to receive definitive treatment.¹ They are too slippery now to have final explanations; too elusive given the multiplicity of personal causes to escape covert political agendas. It is best to be clear on this aspect of the work before beginning or else all sense of reality is lost and the pretense of academic objectivity serves only hidden interests.

The goal here is a simple one. By using life histories to access the folklore of the recent past, it is hoped that more can be learned about the creation of Gay culture in our time and the relationship of culture and identity. Likewise, it is necessary to make assumptions explicit. First, it is necessary to come to grips with some concepts and methods.

¹. The word "Gay" when referring to the group studied here will be capitalized to emphasize the topic. There are as yet no prescriptive rules for capitalization of names of sexual minorities though some have been suggested in usage guides. For example, the Committee on Lesbian and Gay Concerns of the American Psychological Association recommends "the terms gay male and lesbian refer primarily to identities and to the modern culture and communities that have developed among people who share those identities." That point of view is given historical strength by my conversations with older Gay men. Many told me that they first encountered the word "gay" in the sense we use it today when they were "coming out." See "Avoiding Heterosexual Bias in Language," American Psychologist, 46(1991), pp. 973-974. I recognize the pitfall of using the capital "G" meaning Gayness to have a fixed identity or some other kind of static, coherent quality over time. I also think an argument might be made to capitalize lesbian and queer as well. Nevertheless, I think it is justified for emphasis of the population of this study and has positive political import as well. See also chapter 4 "Sexual Orientation" in Marilyn Schwartz and the Task Force on Bias-Free Language of the Association of American University Presses, Guidelines for Bias-Free Writing (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995).

Considerations must be made of identity and some mention must be made of its conceptual correlates in community and ethnicity. The method and rationale of using life histories and oral history and the related issue of working with the target population, in this case older Gay men, must be justified and given a context in scholarship. Some attention must also be paid to the work that has been done with aged Gay men. The historical problem of the rise of Gay culture in the post-World War II era until 1960 as the framing device for this work deserves fuller attention and will wait until the next chapter. The third chapter will provide the foundation of folklore scholarship among Gays.

The culture of the academy demands that such foundations be laid, as does an honest attempt to lay out the issues. What follows in this chapter, then, is a discussion of relevant ideas underlying the whole project. Not surprisingly, given the increasingly interdisciplinary nature of cultural studies and the agglutinating tendency of folklore scholarship, these come from a variety of sources. Obviously, it will be impossible to definitively resolve the debates on these issues. The focus is on those scholars whose works are most relevant or suggestive for the entire project.

The exploration begins with a definitional problem. What are Gay identity, Gay community, Gay culture, Gay folklore? Jonathan Dollimore gives a clue to the difficulty:

"contemporary culture is obsessed with representations and images of homosexuality as something at once excessively and obviously there yet eluding complete identification."² Gay identity is the core problem--what does being Gay mean, how does it represent itself, how do we access it? We know, as Dollimore indicates, that it is out there, but where and how do we know?

Identity must be examined as a concept. Writing on identity comes from several sources: anthropology, sociology, psychology, folklore and the newly emerging cultural studies.³ Identity begins at a personal level with self-definition in response to the question, who am I? The person fills in the answer. Psychologists were the first to explore the idea of identity.⁴ Erik H. Erikson re-examined Freud's notion of personal inner identity. Freud linked his personal identity to his culture, extending his ego identity to being Jewish. Erikson generalized the definition beyond Jewishness by linking in all cases, the personal to the socio-cultural: "The term 'identity'

². Sexual Dissidence (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), pp. 28-29.

³. For an historical overview see Philip Gleason, "Identifying Identity: A Semantic History," Journal of American History, 69(1983), pp. 910-931.

⁴. Most of what follows is based on Gleason and Identity: Personal and Socio-Cultural, a Symposium, ed. by Anita Jacobson-Widding (Stockholm: Almqvist and Wiksell; Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1983). Jacobson-Widding's introduction is an historiographic consideration of identity.

expresses such a mutual relation [between the personal and socio-cultural] in that it connotes both a persistent sameness within oneself (selfsameness) and a persistent sharing of some kind of essential character with others." He prefaces his definition by framing identity with culture indicating that it "points to an individual's link with the unique values, fostered by a unique history, of his people."

⁵ Erikson makes it clear that self-definition can be negotiated and re-defined over the lifespan and charts out the process by which successful identity construction takes place.⁶ What is especially interesting and suggestive for my purposes is his recognition of the identity formation taking place often in crisis in youth and the re-integration of the self in adulthood, followed by what he calls "ego integrity" when integration has been successful. Older Gay men often accomplish this phase of identity against incredible odds and Erikson's statement "Although aware of the relativity of all the various life styles which have given meaning to human striving, the possessor of integrity is ready to

⁵. Erikson, Identity and the Life Cycle (New York: Norton, 1980), p. 109. The first is quoted in Jacobson-Widding, p. 15. Erikson came to the realization that identity as a concept must be grappled with because of his experience as a clinician. His essay "The Problem of Ego Identity" (from which the quotes are taken) explicates the relatedness of personal identity to broader concerns in cultural identity. Also see his summary "Identity, Psychosocial," International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences (New York: Macmillan and the Free Press, 1968).

⁶. Erikson, Identity and the Life Cycle, p. 129.

defend the dignity of his own life style against all physical and economic threats" seems inadvertently meant to describe them perfectly.⁷ Not surprisingly, he is also prescient about America. In a digression, relevant here, he notes that our country's diversity and complex history emphasizes the self-made person disproportionately which poses special difficulties and probable conflicts in identity acquisition for most people. Since autonomy and separateness seem to be the cultural goal and identity is always worked out in consort with others, inevitable difficulties arise.⁸

Later psychiatrists noted the relationship of identity as being a connector of the individual to the culture more generally. Allen Wheelis elevates values as the central foundation of identity. Political and social institutions represent the top of the values hierarchy, and are integral to understanding the nature of how values are enacted in people's lives. In the flux that characterizes our times, he notes, values of these institutions change so rapidly that they leave individuals foundering. He does not ignore the relationship of the individual to institutions in the process of creating values. But aside from a few examples of the ways in which the two influence each other, the relationship is left unexplored. For instance, more could be

⁷. Erikson, Identity and the Life Cycle, p. 104.

⁸. Erikson, Identity and the Life Cycle, p. 99.

made of how particular individuals are able to have greater impact on institutions but for him this topic is outside his realm and must seem to him to be more sociological. His contribution to this study is his suggestive exploration of the late twentieth-century need to give up outworn identities and create new ones to fill the gap.⁹

Cultural identities, it then follows from Wheelis' ideas, are closely related to social norms and social expectations. These qualities of culture are transmitted from generation to generation. How one goes about finding a mate, the appropriate behavior in various social interactions, learning the various routines and rules, all become part of the process of becoming competent in demonstrating one's identity. In modern urban societies the array of possibilities to choose from is enormous. If for some reason the fit between the individual and the family of origin is not good, it is possible to make alternative choices in this environment. For many, the representation of cultural identity varies considerably--one moment it is possible to signify being part of this group, the next moment, that group. In environments which are threatening to one's sense of self, which is the milieu in which most Gay people found themselves in the 1940's and 50's, it became imperative to learn the identity codes very carefully. The

⁹. Allen Wheelis, The Quest For Identity (New York: Norton, 1958).

gap between how one sees oneself and the moral strictures being taught can become enormous. As Erving Goffman suggests, stigma occurs when the public persona and the private life are in conflict.¹⁰

Even as Goffman recognized the dynamic means by which the stigmatized person must present himself, Alan Dundes rightly notes that most scholars have ignored the fact that identity is not static or absolute. A plural society is one in which identity manifests itself differently over time and the life span. And it is not only the choice of identities that varies but also their quality. How a Gay man manifests his Gayness at twenty is not how he will do so at sixty-five. Dundes argues that folklore is one of the manifestations of identity and builds on the work of ethnographers who have investigated the systems by which cultural identity is enacted. He cites many examples and concludes, "Folklore is clearly one of the most important, perhaps the most important, sources for the articulation and perpetuation of a group's symbols."¹¹ Limiting identity to

¹⁰. Erving Goffman, Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1963). Goffman might be productively employed while examining the lives of Gay men during the 40's and 50's since one of the primary characteristics of their lives was their perceived need to have distinct private identities. He only mentions homosexuals a few times in the book, however, and focuses on other kinds of stigmatized individuals such as prostitutes and drug addicts.

¹¹. Alan Dundes, "Defining Identity Through Folklore," in Jacobson-Widding, Identity: Personal and Sociocultural, p. 240. He also gives credit to Richard Bauman's ideas

self, he claims, is to miss the process by which identities become formulated and made concrete. Claiming an identity is an act where an individual recognizes that he is like some and different from others--a process contrasting sameness with differentness. Since folklorists are interested in how people bring meaning to their lives, it is the ways in which identity becomes symbolized, recalled and performed by Gay men that is my focus.¹² In fact, Dundes does deal with issues of gender representation in identity and although he alludes to the use of clothing as a means of identification among Gays, he only points the way for further research.

Few investigations have been made of the ways in which identity is performed, which is an especially glaring problem for the folklorist. A fruitful framework in this approach comes from sociologists George J. McCall and J.L. Simmons. They suggest that role-identities hold the key and while rejecting positivistic approaches they suggest examining the dynamics of interactions and their evolution as the way to enter how individuals devise roles for

drawing them from Bauman's essay, "Differential Identity and the Social Base of Folklore." His paper was part of a larger group of papers from a conference at Indiana University and published as a special issue of JFR (21 (1984), nos. 2-3) titled "Culture, Tradition, Identity Conference." Like most folklore work on identity, the papers concentrate on ethnicity.

¹². Richard Bauman, "Differential Identity and the Social Base of Folklore," JAF, 85(1971), pp. 31-41 asserts, accurately, I think, that folklore is performed not only to claim group identity for the group in question but to demonstrate boundaries as well.

themselves. They take it as given that identities are continually being negotiated and reevaluated in performed interactions with others.¹³ One way in which their work is strikingly dated, however, is found in their review of applications of identity as a concept. There, they lump homosexuals with prostitutes and other "deviants."

Not surprisingly, because of long association of homosexuality with deviance and sociology's historic concern with that concept, the literature on Gay identity is most developed in that discipline. After many years of looking at Gays in a framework of deviance, sociologists began to focus on the coming out process.¹⁴ Implicit in the research is the assumption that there is a Gay identity and that its formation can be tracked. The first book-length treatment on Gay identity, dating from the early 1980's, arises from sociology and develops models of coming out.¹⁵ Weinberg sees

¹³. George J. McCall and J.L. Simmons, Identities and Interactions: An Examination of Human Associations in Everyday Life, revised edition (New York: the Free Press; London: Collier Macmillan, 1978). Today, sociologists are abandoning the idea of deviance altogether. See for example Colin Sumner, The Sociology of Deviance: an Obituary (New York: Continuum, 1994).

¹⁴. Sociologists have yet to let go of the idea that Gay life and deviance are interrelated. As recently as 1981 a textbook for undergraduates Deviant Reality: Alternative World Views by Jeremiah Lowney, Robert W. Winslow and Virginia Winslow included Gays right along with prostitutes, alcoholics and criminals. The chapter dealing with homosexuality was titled "The 'Gay' Life." The quotation marks around the word Gay are especially telling, I think.

¹⁵. Thomas S. Weinberg, Gay Men, Gay Selves: The Social Construction of Homosexual Identities (New York: Irvington

being Gay as an identity which is taken on by the process of self-acceptance. The contrast is made between homosexual behavior and homosexual identity. Identity, here, is rooted in the self and the self-determining process of taking it on or rejecting it. The difficulty in this argument is that it suggests that identity is a goal that is achieved in a linear fashion rather than part of the personality and social persona that is continually negotiated.

Laud Humphreys, a sociologist whose controversial Tearoom Trade was one of the first serious ethnographic works on Gay men, argues vehemently against those who see very little evidence of there being a Gay culture. He actively refutes notions that Gay life is an impoverished culture or one in which the dominant trait is one of self-hatred.¹⁶ By focusing on literary traditions, the growth of a Gay-centered publishing industry and political and support group institutions, he supports the idea that Gays of the 1970's were in the process of making the transition from deviant culture to subculture with enough diversity to support many satellite cultures. Fortunately, for the purposes of this dissertation, he recognizes that there was

Publishers, 1983).

¹⁶. Laud Humphreys, "Exodus and Identity: the Emerging Gay Culture," pp. 134-147 in Gay Men: the Sociology of Male Homosexuality (New York: Harper and Row, 1979), ed. by Martin P. Levine. Several essays in the ground breaking Gay Men are of relevance to this dissertation and will be used in turn.

a Gay culture previous to the liberation movements of the late 1960's. Nevertheless, he sees it as being so covert as to be beyond recognition to most observers. It will become obvious in the chapters to follow that coyness is not relevant to the development of a fully developed array of cultural traits; that by its very coyness, Gay culture may have been given the room necessary to emerge to suit the needs of its participants. Humphreys recognizes as much in his awareness of the situation of all oppressed people vis à vis the larger intolerant controlling society which screens out all non-normative expression and by his comparison of the Gay cultural milieu to that of Blacks in earlier times. Clearly, when he claims the privilege of using elite forms of documenting Gay history he proves the idea that Gays have gone beyond times of extreme marginality. Now elite cultural forms are available. In earlier periods the only option was to use non-elite means of expression. As identities become part of the larger culture, it is no longer necessary to rely on informal means of cultural transmission.

A final suggestion from Humphreys helps characterize ideas about identity generally and helps bridge the connection between the personal and the communal. Seeing identity choices metaphorically as a set of clothes to be tried on, he recognizes that individuals are limited by what their culture makes available to them and their personal abilities to make the fit work. He becomes personal:

I lack the physical capabilities of being a blond decathlon champion, the educational resources necessary for winning a prize in nuclear physics, the economic conditions essential to being a member of the jet set, of the class requirements for becoming an intimate friend of the queen of England...Some identities we cannot have; some we do not want; but each of us must have a valid identity in order to feel important enough to survive.¹⁷

My experience in interviewing Gay men suggests his point is, on the whole, correct. Some are immediately at home in a Gay environment and the fit is perfect; for others some alterations are necessary. For all, however, their psychic and cultural survival demands that Gay life be encountered, considered and at some degree of assimilation chosen or rejected.

In a later essay Laud Humphreys recognized the ways in which joining a community was necessary for the maintenance of identity. "Identities in the Emerging Gay Culture," written with Brian Miller, develops distinctions between Gay scenes where Gay activities may take place, and the Gay subculture which is a more elaborate social system. He also recognizes that Gay culture involves enough people to have its own subgroups thereby becoming a "satellite culture." The ethnographic focus in this piece is how heterosexually-married husbands make the transition from Gay scenes to constructing Gay identities.¹⁸ A similar distinction is made

¹⁷. Humphreys, "Exodus and Identity," p. 144.

¹⁸. Laud Humphreys and Brian Miller, "Identities in the Emerging Gay Culture," pp. 142-156 in Judd Marmor, ed., Homosexual Behavior: a Modern Reappraisal (New York: Basic

by Thomas S. Weinberg who sees a difference between "doing" and "being" Gay. Drawing upon symbolic interactionism as developed in Garfinkel's ethnomethodology, the critical factor for being Gay is the social context and its interpretation by the individual as being Gay.¹⁹

A more recent examination of Gay identity in the sociological tradition demonstrates that Gay and Lesbian youth do not fit the self-hating, maladapted, tortured stereotypical portrait so often found, and in fact exploited, in academic literature or the popular media.²⁰ Savin-Williams' focus, too, is on the coming out process and the taking on of an identity. He also provides empirical data on levels of activity within Gay life using such variables as whether or not a particular person has come out to his parents, begun dating and so on. His interests are the processes by which young Gays and Lesbians come to grips with their identity and building scales to measure the process. Similar approaches are taken by Richard R. Troiden.²¹ In contrast, my purpose is to investigate how

Books, 1980).

¹⁹. Thomas S. Weinberg, "On 'doing' and 'being' Gay: Sexual Behavior and Homosexual Male Self-Identity," Journal of Homosexuality, 4(1978), pp. 143-156.

²⁰. Ritch C. Savin-Williams, Gay and Lesbian Youth: Expressions of Identity (New York: Hemisphere, 1990).

²¹. Richard R. Troiden, "The Formation of Homosexual Identities," Journal of Homosexuality, 17(1989), pp. 43-73; Gay and Lesbian Identity: a Sociological Analysis, (Dix Hills, NY: General Hall, 1988).

identity becomes clearer in expression, competence in cultural interpretation and performance rather than on behavior scales. As Dundes argues, the folklorist's task is to document and examine the ways in which community is expressed in the informal aspects of culture.

The most complex work on Gay identity among social scientists has been done by Vivienne C. Cass. What makes her work bold is her desire to integrate the personal decision making process with the actions necessary for taking on an identity. A trained psychologist, Cass, therefore wants to integrate psychological ideas about identity with sociological ones. Her early work establishes a process by which the individual acquires a homosexual identity. Her homosexual identity has as its goal, internal integration. This goal is accomplished through stages, by which an individual develops increasingly sophisticated strategies for the purpose of fending off feelings of alienation, while re-interpreting the self.²²

Cass acknowledges the difficulty of working out a definition of homosexual identity that is completely

²². Vivienne C. Cass, "Homosexual Identity Formation: a Theoretical Model," Journal of Homosexuality, 4(1979), pp. 219-235. The later article, "Homosexual Identity Formation as a Developmental Process," by Henry L. Minton and Gary J. McDonald, Journal of Homosexuality, 9(1983/84), pp. 91-104, uses Habermas' stages of ego development as its model. Using this model, they partly respond to Cass' work. The universalistic stage of Habermas is equated for Gays as being when it becomes possible for someone to critique society and maintain Gay identity.

satisfactory in all situations.²³ She reviews the literature on the subject, noting its emergence as a research topic in the 1970's. At that time the concept lacked coherence and she ultimately concludes that a multidisciplinary approach is necessary to come to any resolution. The present study is an effort in that process. The balance of her paper concerns the dichotomies of the sexual vs. homosexual identities and the homosexual vs. the Gay identity. She prefaces this section of the article by noting how developmental interpretations from psychology limit themselves to the means by which childhood identity leads to adult acquisition of the identity. The most relevant part of her article to this dissertation is a brief look at homosexual identity as group identity. Group identity, here, is seen as being positive, something to be sought. The idea of Gay identity also functioning as group identity must be related to other group identities, and correlates as ethnic identity and will be emphasized later in this chapter. Cass raises questions to which this present work is meant to be a partial answer: "What is the content of homosexual group identity? What affective and cognitive changes take place as an individual moves from a heterosexual to a homosexual group identity?"²⁴ My focus is not on the psychic

²³. Vivienne C. Cass, "Homosexual Identity: a Concept in Need of Definition," Journal of Homosexuality, 9(1983/84), pp. 105-126.

²⁴. Cass, "Homosexual Identity," p. 119.

developmental processes of the individual per se but rather on how folklore manifests the shift and enculturation to the external group or world. Her essay concludes with an attempt to resolve the dilemma presented in the essentialist/constructionist debates.²⁵ She rightly notes, felicitously, I might add, that homosexual identity is simultaneously fact, construct and fanciful illusion. Folklore plays its role in analysis of culture in those elements that are among the most obviously constructed--that is, in Cass' terms "homosexual identity can arise only in those societies where the homosexual categorization is acknowledged."²⁶ Her later work applies her ideas to the practical concerns of psychology. Looking at the famous Kinsey scales and applying her notion of homosexual identity formation, she makes it clear that the whole significance of sexual preference is quite flexible, that Kinsey's scale is

²⁵. Such resolution is, I think, ultimately impossible since the debate revolves around two separate realms of analysis--one socio-cultural, the other biological. It is a grand issue for which insufficient data exists for conclusions to arise. Mercifully, argument on this topic has died down a bit. For two (among dozens) key works, see Diana Fuss, Essentially Speaking: Feminism, Nature and Difference (New York: Routledge, 1989) and David F. Greenberg, The Construction of Homosexuality (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988).

²⁶. Cass, "Homosexual Identity," p. 121. And her "The Implications of Homosexual Identity Formation for the Kinsey Model and Scale of Sexual Preference," pp. 239-266 in David P. McWhirter, Stephanie A. Sanders and June Machover Reinisch, eds., Homosexuality/Heterosexuality: Concepts of Sexual Orientation (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).

inadequate for describing the reality of Gay and Lesbian experience and that individuals¹ play an enormous role in the decision making process by which a sexual identity is acquired.

It is in the interrelationship between individual experience and the shared interpretation of that experience that community arises. Identity and community reinforce one another. Carol A.B. Warren's ethnographically-based work in Southern California discovered it was possible for Gay men to identify as such only within the bounds of community. She sees the focal point of being Gay as learning how to maneuver with secrecy. "The secret world, especially the world whose secret is a feared stigma, fosters a clear-cut identity as well as a close-knit community."²⁷ Much of the interviewing and observing she did took place in the period under investigation here or with people who reported events of the period.

Identity has also become an integral point of investigation for the newly emerging field of cultural studies and its allied intellectual trends in Gay and Lesbian studies and the related ideas of queer studies which focus more on examining where margins exist between queer and straight. There it is seen as part of a range of issues to be explored with Gay "pride, culture and sensibility."

²⁷. Carol A.B. Warren, Identity and Community in the Gay World (New York: John Wiley, 1974), p. 5.

Gay studies is very much an emerging field with indistinct boundaries and what constitutes Gay studies is contested, even if it has obvious roots in established disciplines such as history, literary criticism, sociology, psychology, anthropology and so on.²⁸ Yet it has come also to what might be called a generational divide and created issues which are its own, the most well-known of which is the so-called essentialist/ constructionist controversy which I outlined earlier. Here, after looking briefly at this controversy for what it reveals about folklore and what folklore reveals about it, I want to examine some of the key ways Gay and Lesbian scholarship has grappled with identity issues.

²⁸. A recent (1993) thirteen volume collection of article reprints titled Studies in Homosexuality (New York: Garland) each with its own subtitle includes ample documentation of academic interest going back to the 1950's. It contrasts, however, with more avant-garde approaches and issues as codified in The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader (New York: Routledge, 1993) ed. by Henry Abelove, Michèle Aina Barale and David M. Halperin. Jeffrey Escoffier discovers five distinct paradigms in the development of Lesbian and Gay Studies including the contrast I am making here in his "Generations and Paradigms: Mainstreams in Lesbian and Gay Studies," pp. 7-26 in Gay and Lesbian Studies, ed. by Henry L. Minton (New York: Harrington Park Press, 1992). Ed Cohen acknowledges the role of identity in the making of so-called Gay studies in his "Are We (Not) What We Are Becoming? Gay 'Identity,' 'Gay Studies,' and the Disciplining of Knowledge," pp. 397-421 in Knowledges: Historical and Critical Studies in Disciplinarity, Ellen Messer-Davidow, David R. Shumway and David J. Sylvan, eds. (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1993). His essay is made up of several shorter episodic pieces which as a whole deal with how his evolving ideas and personal construction of identity determined his academic career. It is a highly fruitful essay for any young academic. One key insight refers to the conundrum of constructing a discipline where the constructors are a part of the subject.

Folklore falls clearly within the realm of construction and reception. When people create and perform, they are enacting the aesthetic values of their group in dialogue both with the group and with those outside it. As such, identity is being performed. In the most synthetic work on the essentialist/constructionist issue, Diane Fuss provides a general framework of the problem with specific case studies of how it is played out with various cultural issues and how specific performances serve to focus on identity. Among Gays, she sees the conflict focused in "identity politics" which she argues is a phrase "taken up by gay activists as something of a rallying cry to stimulate personal awareness and political action."²⁹ She elaborates the rationale for such a position, its necessity at a particular point in history and its essentialist core. But she argues against it, confounding the convention "the personal is political" and distinctly says personal is not political. Rather, the political and the personal are interwoven or as she would put it "co-implicating." One of the most prominent Gay thinkers, Jeffrey Weeks, agrees, noting that sexual identity is inherently ambiguous given that 'sexuality' itself is "about flux and change."³⁰

²⁹. Diane Fuss, Essentially Speaking: Feminism, Nature and Difference (New York: Routledge, 1989), p.97.

³⁰. "Questions of Identity," pp. 31-51 in Pat Caplan, ed., The Cultural Construction of Sexuality (London: Tavistock, 1987).

Though he sees limits to the usefulness of the concept of identity he also acknowledges its necessity as a means of negotiating oneself in the complex web of potential relationships at both the individual and group level.

The question of whether or not homosexuality must be either socially constructed or biologically determined is not entirely beside the point here. Clearly, I am concerned with one aspect of the construction. The larger essentialist/constructionist debate needs more data, I think, and my enterprise is to discover more about how people live their lives, and what they say about them.³¹

Other relevant landmarks in Gay studies which deal with identity are more explicitly political. Stephen Epstein's "Gay Politics, Ethnic Identity: the Limits of Social Construction," is representative of the dialogue in which Fuss participates and was, in fact, a key early piece.³² The primary importance of Epstein's article lies in the fact

³¹. The essentialist/constructionist issue is one of the hottest in cultural studies and all the major social theorists of our time (Derrida, Lacan and Foucault, for example) are brought into the debate. I only demonstrate its relevance to my topic. Essentially Speaking deals with issues across many fields. Perhaps more directly relevant here are Edward Stein, ed., Forms of Desire: Sexuality and the Social Constructionist Controversy (New York: Garland, 1990) which collects a variety of published views on the issue and David F. Greenberg's massive The Construction of Homosexuality (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988) which looks at an enormous variety of cultures over time and space. I find the debate ultimately unsatisfying because as it devolved into an arcane academic debate it lost sight of an explicit moral or even empirical component.

³². Socialist Review 93/94(1987), pp. 9-54.

that it aims to integrate theory and practice. That is to say, he wants to find a way to use the essentialist/constructionist debate to inform and provide a means of understanding Gay politics. With such a goal in mind, he demonstrates that Gay identity has emerged in a world where it was necessary for it to emerge--a world in which "identity has increasingly come to be seen as something quite important" since modern life has made the relationship between the individual and the mass so fluid. Further, Epstein sees linking Gay identity to concepts of ethnicity as being of primary importance and persuasively argues that the fluidity with which "ethnicity" is applied as a force for cohesiveness makes it a useful analytic construct for furthering the political goals of Gays. When ethnic groups cohere, he argues, they have greater impact on the larger society. The key element for folklorists, however, is his recognition of the false nature of the polarity between "choice" and "constraint" in all these issues. He raises a question that interests the folklorist: "out of the range of potential forms of sexual expression, how are limitations created on that expression, both socially and within the individual psyche?" (p. 44)

Expression of identity is the stuff of folklore and it is the extent to which people are able to demonstrate their choices that interests me. Henry Glassie puts it best:

Human beings are defined neither by conditions nor by moments of escape. Wishing for frightening

comparability, I want to see people as they are: free and stuck in the world. My interest is in the constant interplay of will and circumstance, so I care less about the rare celebration than about the daily round, and I care less about form than content. I am concerned less with the structure of society than with the quality of social life, less with the economic system than with the nature of work, less with genres of literature than the meaning in texts. I ask not how people fit into the plots of others but how they form their own lives, not what people do once in a while but what they do all the time.³³ (my emphasis)

It is those aspects of culture which are volitional and the extent to which they are chosen that are most relevant here.

I am looking at a group of men who managed to express themselves in the most oppressive of circumstances. I am interested in how they did it, what their choices were and where the boundaries of expressiveness can be found.

Others, too, have recognized the political ramifications of building the emergent Gay identity. John D'Emilio argues that the contradictions inherent in capitalism have made the multiplication of sexual choices possible.³⁴ Briefly, capitalism simultaneously enshrines the family and breaks it apart. Its ideology enshrines the nuclear family as a source of stability while its economic basis, requiring as it does labor leaving the home, forces its dilution. Of course, in such an environment, inevitably,

³³. Henry Glassie, Passing the Time in Ballymenone: Culture and History of an Ulster Community (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982), p. 15.

³⁴. John D'Emilio, "Capitalism and Gay Identity," pp. 100-113 in Powers of Desire: the Politics of Sexuality, ed. by Ann Snitow, Christine Stansell and Sharon Thompson (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1983).

D'Emilio reminds us, people would explore other possibilities and he suggests that the shifting social and economic structures of the eighteenth and nineteenth century provided "space" for people to be Gay. More people began to choose that space and as he puts it, "There are more of us than one hundred years ago, more of us than forty years ago." (p. 109)³⁵ In a real sense, then, he argues that there are more Gay people today than ever before.

D'Emilio notes the economic component in the earlier centuries. Jeffrey Escoffier brings the analysis closer to the present recognizing the role of Keynesianism in the rise of a Gay cultural identity.³⁶ The welfare state allowed for greater autonomy from families since individuals were able to be less dependent on them for economic support. Escoffier's work also examines Gay identity since World War II connecting its manifestations and arguments to the larger culture. He sees the role of the sexual revolution as having a causal effect on Gay identity. In the 1950's identity issues revolved around debates over "assimilationist" and "cultural-minority" points of view. By the late 1960's concern lessened about being public about one's

³⁵. See also Jeffrey Weeks, "Movements of Affirmation: Sexual Meanings and Homosexual Identities," pp. 70-86 in Kathy Peiss, Christina Simmons and Robert A. Padgug, Passion and Power: Sexuality in History (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989).

³⁶. Jeffrey Escoffier, "Sexual Revolution and the Politics of Gay Identity," Socialist Review, 82/83(1985), pp. 119-153.

homosexuality so coming out as a political act became the focus of analysis.

Yet even broader issues are at stake according to social movement theorists. If the political dimension is emphasized, the question of identity looms larger since its consequences are more far reaching. Sociologists and political scientists are interested in it in so far as it reveals what, in fact, a movement is. Jean L. Cohen relates two paradigms: 1) resource-mobilization and 2) identity-oriented. By making the contrast, she places the experience of movements to the fore and is interested in how theories by and within movements can be illuminating for the social scientist. Thus, she emphasized the role movements play in building social theory. Her article is relevant here since it demonstrates the wide ramifications of identity as a concept and also reminds a broader audience of social scientists of the reality the folklorists have known all along, that listening to people is the most important task in any social study.³⁷ Her broader point also must be clear too, since folklorists have historically often ignored its importance: strategic action, even in the communicative acts of identity, must be analyzed in social systems. This point is especially important in times of political conflict. Surely, gender-based conflicts are among the defining

³⁷. Jean L. Cohen, "Strategy or Identity: New Theoretical Paradigms and Contemporary Social Movements," Social Research, 52(1985), pp. 663-716.

characteristics of our time.

Anthropologists, too, have examined how identity operates within the political sphere. Largely concerned with symbolic constructions of identity within the modern state, Zdzislaw Mach examines the ways in which governments and ethnic groups manipulate symbols as boundary markers and deliniators of world view. What makes his work especially provocative is his recognition of how identity symbols work in the contest for power and their inherent, continually fluctuating, instability. His examples come largely from eastern Europe and though, he admits, that with most anthropologists he uses identity to mean ethnic identity his ideas apply to gender-based identity questions.³⁸

Identity is a concern even in the more avant-garde moves to "queer studies." Clearly, the emphasis on "queerness" in the making of identities overlaps with the concerns of the seemingly more staid Gay and Lesbian studies and even shares practitioners, yet it has a different emphasis, too. Queerness emphasizes difference to a degree not found in other lines of thought. While some have sought to find the ways in which Gays and Lesbians are like straights, queers defiantly pursue an identity that is based on difference. Paradoxically, queerness also then becomes

³⁸. Zdzislaw Mach, Symbols, Conflict and Identity: essays in political anthropology (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993). His summaries of scholarship relating to the interrelationship of identity and symbol are lucid and helpful.

more inclusive seeking all those whose difference makes them feel queer by contemporary mainstream standards.³⁹

The most visible manifestation of queerness becoming part of the ongoing dialogue about identity among Gays and Lesbians is, of course, Queer Nation. Though some theoreticians discovered queerness as an analytical concept before encountering Queer Nation, it must be pointed out that the generation of Gays and Lesbians coming of age in the 1990's increasingly refers to itself as queer without awareness of the theoretical. At this point, the tangle of Gay/Lesbian Studies, Cultural Studies and Queer studies, is not sorted out but much work is relevant here, with theorists crossing dialogical lines as their thinking has evolved.

Many theorists have been prodded by Foucault to see identity anew. Ed Cohen is "profoundly influenced" by him. A trenchant quote of Foucault by Cohen illumines the issues in the mind of this queer theorist:

We must be aware of...the tendency to reduce being gay

³⁹. The literature of queer studies is so vast that it is impossible to keep up with it. The articles I discuss are ones I have found representative or have influenced the way I have looked at the interviews I have done. Notable articles are "Sexual Orientation and Sexual Identity: challenging conventional concepts," by John H. Wu, Q: the Journal of Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Studies at UCLA 1(1993), pp. 65-85 and Alexander S. Chee, "A Queer Nationalism," Outlook: National Lesbian and Gay Quarterly, no. 11(1991), pp. 15-19. Chee's article was part of a series in that issue titled "Birth of a Queer Nation" which has stimulated debate both in the academy and on the street.

to the questions: "Who am I?" and "What is the secret of my desire." Might it not be better if we asked ourselves what sort of relationships we can set up, invent, multiply or modify through our homosexuality? The problem is not trying to find out the truth of one's sexuality within oneself, but rather, nowadays, trying to use our sexuality to achieve a variety of different types of relationships. And this is why homosexuality is probably not a form of desire, but something to be desired. We must therefore insist on becoming gay, rather than persist in defining ourselves as such.⁴⁰

For the folklorist, the question becomes "how do people manifest or perform being gay?" Cohen, does not want a fixed identity but rather sees the motion, or as he cleverly puts it, (e)motion, to fix an identity as ultimately self-contradictory. Though he does not mind the contradictory nature of fixing identity, he wants collective politics to become more flexible--that is, more of a trajectory than a goal. Eschewing the "we" he looks toward an identity that begins with a self that is ultimately and continually processed through differentiation in relationships with others to interrupt historical patterns of oppression. It will become abundantly clear that folklore is one of the processes through which differentiation is performed and used to signal the interruption of oppression.

Jonathan Katz in dialogue with Cohen acknowledges the impossibility of fixing identity in any one set of

⁴⁰. Michel Foucault, "Friendship as a Lifestyle: An Interview with Michel Foucault," Gay Information, 7(Spring 1981), p. 4 quoted in Ed Cohen, "Who are 'We'? Gay 'Identity' as Political (E)motion (A Theoretical Rumination), pp. 71-92 in Diane Fuss, ed., inside/out: lesbian theories/gay theories (New York: Routledge, 1991).

descriptions and finds that any identity definition that is based on opposition to heterosexuality only plays into the privilege structure defined by heterosexual institutions. He is interested in resolving the identity debates with a goal of more real engagement with on-the-street kinds of activism. What he is getting at is the reality that sexuality is inherently "a very unstable foundation for building reality" and as such can never be really captured. What can be done, however, is examine how it is made manifest in acts of performance. He concludes that "No one can control identity. The question is expression, and that is the realm that is policed." It is the nexus of identity and expression that interests the folklorist and my purpose is to discover artistic manifestations of its expression. The politics of his argument is right also and the men I talked to can corroborate it. When Gay identity was performed, even by people who were self-defined as apolitical, then it became a matter of direct police action often with serious consequences to the people involved.⁴¹

⁴¹. Katz unpublished talk at the Sager Symposium at Swarthmore in March 1992 was titled "Performing in the Play of Queerness: Activists and Critics doing Their Part." One off hand comment he made referring to queer theorists lack of being in touch with on the ground realities is worth noting from the folklorist's point of view. "We, in short, enact a we, and in so performing that we constitute ourselves as a community within a particular context, and that we all understand this as a performance and are not troubled by it. In this limited sense, Butler's [to whom he refers] notions of the performative identity are useful, but hardly original. I mean if the insight is that queer identity is performative, would someone please tell that to

Some argue that the strain in Gay thinking and activity that is most relevant to identity debates is the move toward a postmodern view of the world. Noting that postmodernism inherently recognizes that all claims to knowledge are based in social and moral movements, Steven Seidman locates it "as speaking of multiple, local, intersecting struggles whose aim is less 'the end of domination' or 'human liberation' than the creation of social spaces that encourage the proliferation of pleasures, desires, voices, interests, modes of individualism and democratization."⁴² By recognizing the multiplicity of locations from which identity appears, Seidman is able to also incorporate the identity conflicts that became explicitly apparent during the 1980's. It was during this period that for lack of a better term "minorities within minorities" became an aspect of being Gay and a matter of debate. It was clear, then, that the focus could not only be on being Gay alone but rather it was necessary to have shifting foci on being Gay and African-American, Gay and S&M or leather, and so on. In

the drag queens. I don't think they'd find it news." As Henry Glassie pointed out in a class I took long ago, when we theorize about the people we study we are only pointing out things they know already.

⁴². Steven Seidman, "Identity and Politics in a 'Postmodern' Gay Culture: Some Historical and Conceptual Notes," pp. 105-142 in Michael Warner, ed., Fear of A Queer Planet: Queer Politics and Social Theory (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993). The historical component of his article cogently summarizes some of the political implications of identity debates during the 1970's and 80's.

interviews with men who were out during the 1940's and 1950's these multiple identities played a part but not nearly so large a one as they came to in more recent times.

It is increasingly obvious, then, that there is no fixed Gay identity. Over time it has clearly shifted shapes and lacked a location that everyone could either agree on or even argue about and Jonathan Dollimore's words quoted (p.4) earlier ring as true as ever. One obvious measure of its fluidity has been the relationship of Gays to societal norms of masculinity. To identify as Gay in the past twenty years has meant to have a different concept of one's own masculinity, one that is more pronounced, than that of most of the people I have talked with. For some, the nexus of masculinity and Gayness can be the focus to trace historical shifts in Gay identity.⁴³ It is a powerful confluence given the stakes that medicine and the law place on gender specific normative behavior. In chapter 7 I will examine some of the ways Gays themselves viewed this nexus.

Identity is often reduced to ethnic identity so identity becomes almost synonymous with its correlate concept of ethnicity. Yet it is obvious that when we speak of Gay identity we are speaking about something that is different from, say, Irish-American identity. The contrast,

⁴³. David Forrest, "'We're here, we're queer, and we're not going shopping': Changing gay male identities in contemporary Britain," pp. 97-110 in Andrea Cornwall and Nancy Lindisfarne, eds., Dislocating Masculinity: Comparative Ethnographies (London: Routledge, 1994).

though, is that we can speak of Irish-American ethnicity but not Gay ethnicity. Is ethnicity only "'race' without the biology?" Anthropologists who have raised these questions no longer assume they have a static quality. Rather like identity, ethnicity is seen as being an idea continually meaningful only in a context of "oppositions and relativities." The use of these terms also reveals the problems of essentialist positions regarding human culture. It is important to see these concepts as relevant here to prevent the nascent Gay and Lesbian studies from landing in an academic ghetto. The conflict over the meanings of these terms, suggests just the opposite. Research into Gay culture is central to the understanding of all human culture.⁴⁴

This long exploration over identity is necessary, then, if only because it is a central concept both in its academic sense and its more vernacular one. For academic purposes, I have outlined some of ways in which identity can productively be employed. For my purposes there are three key elements: 1) identity must be explored in its manifest forms--how is it performed and what do performers say about their performances and representations? 2) identity is always multivocal and negotiated--it is never fixed and will

⁴⁴. The history of the term "ethnic" is outlined in Malcolm Chapman, Maryon McDonald and Elizabeth Tonkin, "Introduction--History and Social Anthropology," pp. 1-21 in History and Ethnicity ed. by Malcolm Chapman, Maryon McDonald and Elizabeth Tonkin (London: Routledge, 1989). Also see Fredrik Barth, Ethnic Groups and Boundaries (Boston: Little, Brown, 1969).

be manifest in several ways, sometimes simultaneously and 3) much of the personal battle for self-integration for Gay people is surrounded by issues of self-identity and group identity. For Gays, the integration of both forms of identity is different than it is for most people because although they integrate into an already existing social world, it is not, as it is for most people, one into which they are born.

This last element ties the social issue to the personal and vernacular use of the term. Clearly, from my brief literature review, my own experience and the interviews I have conducted, there is an event in the life of a Gay person when the individual comes to an understanding that he is Gay. Some social scientists, especially developmental psychologists, have made this moment the most important one in becoming Gay. This aspect is manifest in "coming out" stories. Others, primarily historians and those in cultural studies, argue that "being Gay" is a construction and its relationship to identifying as Gay is indeterminate. Yet, many Gay people will say they were Gay all along and coming out was only a recognition that they were no longer the only person with this identity.⁴⁵ In effect, they are discovering the community beyond the self. For the folklorist, it is imperative to listen to people's self-explanations and

⁴⁵. Much of the popular coming out literature is, in fact, of the "you are not alone" variety.

experiences in how they come to understand their identities and make them manifest in native genres.

The idea of community is also significant for the study of Gay people if for no other reason than it is commonplace to speak of "the Gay community" as politicians and social scientists and many Gay people, in fact, often do. The interrelationship of community and identity in research about Gays has been established for some time. As a person comes out, he is likely seek companionship in a social world that is simultaneously an idea and a group. What proportion of the psychic and concrete space the group occupies in the person's life is individually decided but finding the community of their fellows becomes an integral part of ongoing identity development.⁴⁶

As I have indicated, because the voices of people living and explaining their lives is so important to the discipline of folklore, the methodology that I have chosen to get at this explanation of identity and its manifestation in folklore is interpreting life histories using focused interviewing techniques. This approach seemed the most

⁴⁶. Carol A.B. Warren, cited earlier, makes the relationship between identity and community explicit in her 1974 book. Even earlier, Martin Hoffman's analysis, though its view of homosexual pathology is dated, makes the connection. See his The Gay World: Male Homosexuality and the Social Creation of Evil (New York: Basic Books, 1968). Also see A.P. Cohen's The Symbolic Construction of Community (Chichester: Ellis Harwood; London: Tavistock, 1985) which combines a variety of analytic methods, not just symbolic to understanding the interrelationship between identity and community, boundaries and inclusions.

appropriate for several reasons. Given the historical period I am interested in, it would be impossible, of course, to observe folkloric events directly. There is little in the way of concrete documentary evidence from the era (although there is some, and alternative sources can be used as well) so if the tenor of the period is to be understood it is essential to speak to those who were there. Given the age of the people involved, it was important that their memories be recorded as soon as possible. Second, my chosen discipline of folklore values the voices of people above all other forms of representation and, if available, their testimony must be the focus.⁴⁷ Furthermore, as a field research technique, life history is well developed enough to provide guidance in how to proceed and is increasingly adopted by folklorists as a methodology.

The most synthetic examination of the life history approach is Lives: an Anthropological Approach to Biography by L.L. Langness and Gelya Frank.⁴⁸ Obviously growing out of

⁴⁷. Even in material culture studies conducted by folklorists, the emphasis on the person and what is said about the created object is valorized.

⁴⁸. Novato, California: Chandler and Sharp, 1981. Also see Field Research: a Sourcebook and Field Manual (London: Routledge, 1991) ed. by Robert G. Burgess. It reprints several articles on life history methods in the field. Some of these also touch upon its relationship to oral and local history. Another synthetic work which provides definitional clarification is Norman K. Denzin, Interpretive Biography, Qualitative Research Methods Series, no. 17 (Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1993). There is even an annual collection The Narrative Study of Lives (Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1993-). Though focused on

anthropology, their work speaks to the task of folklorists as well, since many of the early practitioners of the method were field workers who are also claimed by folklorists. This interconnection is not surprising since much of the early work in life history was done among native peoples of North America--one of the groups that was part of the original mission statement of the American Folklore Society. Franz Boas, Elsie Clews Parsons, among others, incorporated life histories in their work. Yet after their generation, folklorists were not as concerned with biographical methods, with few exceptions. When they applied the method, they did so in the form of biographical analysis of particular folk artists or musicians and seeking patterns in the lives of legendary figures. Goldstein, alone, among the manuals of folklore field work discusses life history.⁴⁹ Examples he gives of using the method that are relevant to my field approach are called episodic and topical. The first looks at particular periods in the life of a particular person while the second recommends conducting field work with an eye to discovering thematic wholes throughout the lifespan.

Langness and Frank's book is a manual of how life histories are taken, providing sections on practical matters

psychological qualitative approaches, much of the data and method employed in its articles are relevant to the folklorist.

⁴⁹. Kenneth S. Goldstein, A Guide for Field Workers in Folklore (Hatboro, Pennsylvania: Folklore Associates, 1964), pp. 121-127.

such as gaining rapport and taking ethical responsibility. Some of the suggestions of means of analysis are personality, self-reflective and life development approaches. All three are relevant to my work. As a means of discovering how the people I spoke with coped with and flourished as Gay men it was imperative that I interview them in enough depth to achieve an understanding of their personalities and a window into their own self-understanding. The section of this dissertation on the interviews will of necessity be to a large extent dual biography since the process inherently requires some revealing of who I am. Watson and Watson-Franke put the subjective quality of the life history method quite succinctly. "The problem, therefore, is this: the life history is a subjective product, but one that is approached by another subject who himself interprets."⁵⁰ Finally, my informants are quite far along in the life process and consequently developmental approaches recognizing their experiences and interpretations as being at that particular moment in their lives are necessarily incorporated in any interpretation.

Charlotte Linde recognizes the reality that a life history is also an explication of self-understanding at a particular point in time. Her work is focused on how

⁵⁰. Interpreting Life Histories: an Anthropological Inquiry (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1985), p. 31.

linguistic analysis can provide understanding of life histories if they are seen as discourse. Though most of her work is more tied to the concerns of linguistics, her definition of life story provides a programmatic frame for my endeavor:

A life story consists of all the stories and associated discourse units, such as explanations and chronicles, and the connections between them, told by an individual during the course of his/her lifetime that satisfy the following two criteria:

1. The stories and associated discourse units contained in the life story have as their primary evaluation a point about the speaker, not a general point about the way the world is.
2. The stories and associated discourse units have extended reportability; that is, they are tellable and are told and retold over the course of a long period of time.⁵¹

Her definition is useful to me with one important caveat. In my experience, many times people told stories about themselves and things they observed as a way of making a general point about the way the world is. Her emphasis on what she calls "coherence" is indirectly useful, too. She sees it as the way in which individuals make their lives socially sharable to others. For Gay men, this is an imperative. For them, the ability and opportunity to narrate become the primary means of making sense of their lives. For my work, their ability to narrate and make connections between their lives and their observations of Gay life, was

⁵¹. Charlotte Linde, Life Stories: the Creation of Coherence (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 21.

the key element in making my project possible.⁵²

In folklore, there have also been definitional concerns. Some are engaged in making distinctions between life history, life story, folk biography, oral history and personal narrative. Although all these reflect the folklorist's historic concerns for generic systems, etic and emic, the distinctions are in the details rather than core issues involved.⁵³ The most important distinction in

⁵². As indicated, most of Linde's book focuses on linguistics. Nevertheless, she aids folklorists by examining the role of life history in other fields and giving an explanation of the idea of common sense--a concept often taken for granted in our discipline and one about which more analysis is needed. Another flaw, it seems to me, is that the emphasis on coherence denies the reality that many peoples lives are, in fact, incoherent. Emphasizing coherence also misses that many lives are characterized by resistance to social norms as well. Oral history as a method is also relevant. See The Voice of the Past: Oral History by Paul Thompson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978) for an overview of approaches.

⁵³. The key papers from folklore are: Jeff Todd Titon, "The Life Story," JAF, 93(1980), pp. 276-292 and the proceedings of a conference of American and Hungarian folklorists titled "The Cultural Transmission of Life-Course Models." The proceedings were published as Life History as Cultural Construction/ Performance, ed. by Tamás Hofer and Péter Niedermüller (Budapest: Ethnographic Institute of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, 1988). Many of the papers focused on particular individuals though all had general applications. The most useful to me were: Linda Dégh, "Beauty, Wealth and Power: Career Choices for Women in Folktales and Modern Media," pp. 13-47; Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "Authoring Lives," pp. 133-178; Ferenc Pataki, "Identity Models and Identity Construction," pp. 357-378 and Péter Niedermüller, "From the Stories of Life to the Life History: Historic Context, Social Process, and the Biographical Method," pp. 451-473. Much of the following discussion is engaged with these papers. Also see Lebenslauf und Lebenszusammenhang: Autobiographische Materialien in der volkskundlichen Forschung, ed. by Rolf Wilh. Brednich, Hannjost Lixfeld, Dietz-Rüdiger Moser and Lutz Röhrich

contemporary folkloristics might be to separate the life history as oral unit from the personal experience narrative. The former might be seen to be extended narratives while the latter are usually focused on a particular theme or told in context to demonstrate an emphatic point. In actual performance, life histories are, however often include personal experience narratives. Sometimes they even use them as the building blocks for the longer narrative piece. Linda Dégh's definition of life history provides some mediation of these contrasting categories of story:

"What is a life story? A narrative, a text, which may be told orally as solicited by direct interviewing, and structured by a prepared questionnaire. It could also be a product of an intensive analytical conversation between researcher and respondent. But it could also come close to spontaneous narration in which the researcher minimizes his influence on the natural context, allowing the speaker maximum liberty to express himself, -- a situation preferable to the folklorist focusing on human creativity. It can also be a literary product in print or manuscript form. By extension, the life history need not be a formal narrative, told or written at all. Individuals may also embody their autobiographical testimony in other symbolic forms: photographs, painting, handicraft, cookery, gardening or other personal attempt of expression. (Dégh, pp. 15-16)

Here life history may be seen directly as partly researcher's construct and an individual's expression on a continuum between the short and extended narrative, or the etic and emic. Interestingly, this same sort of tension is experienced by everyone who relates a life story. In effect

(and strongly tied to identity issues), everyone telling this kind of narrative must be asking what do I want my stories to say about me? This question arises both in the personal individual sense and more generally in the selection of roles people chose for themselves in life and the parts of them that are represented. Further negotiation takes place in the question what are the communicative norms for expressing life histories in specific contexts?⁵⁴

None of these methods and field techniques are strictly new in the folklorist's enterprise. Nor is the recognition of the inherent tension between the creator's system and the field worker's construct. Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett and Jeff Todd Titon describe the many classic works from folklore scholars that consciously or unconsciously employ the life history method and the characteristic reflexivity of the process.⁵⁵ The conundrum of authority and interpretation and the shared work of community people and humanist is recognized clearly by these folklorists. They also recognize that it is essential that the process of understanding life histories not be reduced to merely collecting objects and classifying them.⁵⁶ Niedermüller

⁵⁴. Pataki, p.359.

⁵⁵. See Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, pp. 144-149 and Titon, pp. 285-288.

⁵⁶. Here I have paraphrased Michael Frisk, A Shared Authority: Essays on the Craft and Meaning of Oral and Public History (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), p. 189. Though oral historians have their own

emphasizes this interpretive, negotiated quality. First, the speaker must have some sense of what a life history is, and only then, can it be related to anyone else. Second, only certain stories are told--ones that give meaning to the present.⁵⁷ Here, the relationship and the connection between two individuals is established in the attempt of create a sense of a whole life even if they have different understandings of the other parts of the interviewing process.⁵⁸ This connection, always tenuous, is part of the larger existential dilemma of our time. As Mark E. Workman puts it:

The contemporary self, as everyone knows is distinguished by its almost malignant, "self-consuming" incompleteness. At its center lies not fulfillment but longing, an awareness of but an inability to possess that which would make closure of identity possible. In a sense, therefore, the contemporary self has no center at all. When compared to folkloristic accounts of selves, it is not surprising to find contemporary life stories marked by a kind of double paradox: not only are these self-expressions inevitably suspect, because they are necessarily fictive, but so too are the beings of which the stories are representations, since the existence of these beings is as doubtful as, and yet as dependent upon the very stories which constitute

concerns, many dovetail closely with those of folklorists, especially those who look at life history as a methodology.

⁵⁷. Niedermüller, pp. 466-468.

⁵⁸. Feminist approaches in folklore have motivated a growing recognition of interdependence in field work processes. See Elaine J. Lawless, "Women's Life Stories and Reciprocal Ethnography as Feminist and Emergent," Journal of Folklore Research, 28(1991), pp. 35-60. Another example of reflexive field work in folklore is Bente Gullveig Alver, Creating the Source Through Folklore Fieldwork, Folklore Fellows Communication, no. 246 (Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, 1990).

them.⁵⁹

When the making of the life stories involves the aged the paradoxes Workman exposes must be foregrounded since this population is often quite reflective anyway and trying to come to terms with and make closure with often complex and contradictory experiences.

Yet, some resolution may take place in the person's sense of self. The combination of folklore and life history aids the process and nowhere does this intersection make more sense and become more accentuated than in work with the aged. There is a natural link between the two. The aged obviously have the longest lives to relate and often are among the most reflective about creating coherence around them. Folklorists have recognized the value of older people as valuable members of communities in ways that other disciplines often have not. There is also an academic link in the work of Barbara Myerhoff. Her work at a Jewish community center in Venice, California led to a general recognition among humanistically-oriented social scientists of the value of life history perspectives in talking with the aged. In Number Our Days, she describes in intimate terms the way in which she came to know and revere the residents of the Aliyah Senior Citizens' Center.⁶⁰ The

⁵⁹. Mark E. Workman, "Narratable and Unnarratable Lives," Western Folklore, 51(1992), pp. 97-98; Bente Gullveig Alver, Creating the Source Through Folkloristic Fieldwork, Folklore Fellows Communication, no. 246, (Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedekatemia, 1990).

concrete demonstration she makes of the inherent polyvocality of the process in working in this community has served as a model for later researchers.

In Listening to Old Voices, Patrick B. Mullen's field work built on Myerhoff's and revealed the similarity of the rhetorical devices used by the aged in conveying their life experiences.⁶¹ Though his nine subjects were vastly different in most outward expressions of identity, Mullen found common use of how they employed distancing strategies in relating their past experiences. In other words, they always set their narratives clearly in the distant past by such expressions as "long ago" and "in the old days." Likewise, many older Gay men distanced themselves from the world they entered as young men from the present by referring to it as the "old days."

Life history work has also had its impact on the study

⁶⁰. (New York: Dutton, 1978). Also see a collection of her essays, Remembered Lives: The Work of Ritual, Storytelling, and Growing Older (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992) edited by Marc Kaminsky. Some of these essay predate Number Our Days though they are based in her experiences in Venice. Kaminsky's lengthy introduction contextualizes Myerhoff's contributions to the study of the aged. Remember, too, Myerhoff's documentary film Number Our Days won an Academy Award in 1978.

⁶¹. (University of Illinois Press, 1992). See especially his concluding chapter about the common threads he found. The Grand Generation: Memory, Mastery, Legacy by Mary Hufford, Marjorie Hunt and Steven Zeitlin (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1987) is also a key book about folklore and the elderly. Based on a travelling exhibit, it uses not only reminiscences but also looks at the ways in which the aged are still creative.

of Gays, although I am sure most of the writers and compilers do not explicitly see themselves as part of an academic tradition of life history research. There seems to be an almost intuitive rationale for these accounts of Gay lives. It is rather as if the authors are compelled to tell their stories. There are more than a dozen books which are collections of published recollections of Gay men. Many of these serve as fecund source material for the folklore and events they describe.⁶² Some of them are closer to written autobiography than life history yet others are deliberately taken from oral interviews including a few that focus on older men.⁶³

The importance of life history work among older Gay men has been recognized by historians and concerned community members, even if there is much to be done for the sake of both the people themselves and scholarship more generally. This recognition like most of the work with older Gay men has come from the field of social work and some grass roots efforts to provide social services.⁶⁴ The few articles that

⁶². John D'Emilio reviews several of these and discusses their import in "The Stuff of History: First-Person Accounts of Gay Male Lives," Journal of the History of Sexuality 3(1992), pp. 314-319.

⁶³. Keith Vacha, Quiet Fire: Memoirs of Older Gay Men (Trumansburg, NY: Crossing Press, 1985). Conversations With My Elders by Boze Hadleigh (New York: St. Martin's, 1986) is actually interviews with well-known older Gay men.

⁶⁴. Frank S. Galassi, "A Life-Review Workshop for Gay and Lesbian Elders," Journal of Gerontological Social Work,

have been written on older Gay men focus on their ability to adapt under trying circumstances.⁶⁵ Much of this literature is devoted to countering stereotypes of older homosexuals as lonely, desperate men. Some conclude that being homosexual, in fact, may aid in the aging process since much of growing older is adjusting to a "life crisis" and the assumption is that Gays have become adept at dealing with life crises early in life because they have had to confront the stigma attached to homosexuality. Others conclude that older Gays share common characteristics with older straights and face the same sorts of problems or focus on unique aspects of Gay and Lesbian aging patterns.⁶⁶

16(1991), pp. 75-86 and Douglas C. Kimmel, "Life-History Interviews of Aging Gay Men," International Journal of Aging and Human Development, 10(1979/80), pp. 239-248. The largest and most successful community organization for older Gays and Lesbians is SAGE (Senior Action in a Gay Environment). See Morgan Gwenwald, "The Sage Model for Serving Older Lesbians and Gay Men," Journal of Social Work and Homosexuality, 2(1983/84), pp. 53-61. People involved with SAGE have been the source for much of the published information about older Gays.

⁶⁵. See, for example, Douglas C. Kimmel, "Adult Development and Aging: A Gay Perspective," Journal of Social Issues, 34(1978), pp. 113-130; Heather Gray and Paula Dressel, "Alternative Interpretations of Aging Among Gay Males," The Gerontologist, 25(1985), pp. 83-87; Jean K. Quam and Gary S. Whitford, "Adaptation and Age-Related Expectations of Older Gay and Lesbian Adults," The Gerontologist, 32(1992), pp. 367-374.

⁶⁶. Those arguing for the advantages of being homosexual in the aging process are, for example, Richard A. Friend, "Older Lesbian and Gay People: Responding to Homophobia," Marriage and Family Review, 14(1989), pp. pp. 241-263 and the earlier article by J. Scott Francher and Janet Henkin, "The Menopausal Queen: Adjustment to Aging and the Older Homosexual," American Journal of Orthopsychiatry,

Social work as a field, like folklore, has placed a great emphasis on interviewing and listening skills. The goals differ, however, in that social workers listen to locate hitherto undisclosed data about the psychological and physical well-being of their subjects while the folklorist is interested in how the aged can inform the present about aesthetic concerns and in that process simultaneously help themselves. In the course of research about older Gays, social workers could not help but recognize the importance of life history methods. They are, in fact, a large component of the only monograph-length treatment of the subject.⁶⁷ Fortunately, for the folklorist, in the course of conducting and transcribing these interviews, much folkloric material and contextual information is included.

When meeting real people living their lives there can be no absolute definitions for the terms employed here. Even words like "aged" and "older" shift focus. Much depends upon the motivation of the person using the terms. The

43(1973), pp. 670-674. John Alan Lee is quite persuasive in the opposite perspective in "What Can Homosexual Aging Studies Contribute to Theories of Aging?," Journal of Homosexuality, 13(1987), pp. 43-71. For an interesting common adaptation among older Gays see "The Families of Older Gay Men and Lesbians," by Douglas C. Kimmel, Generations, 16(Summer 1992), pp. 37-38.

⁶⁷. Raymond M. Berger, Gay and Gray: the Older Homosexual Man (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982). Interview also played a role in the first dissertation on the subject: James J. Kelley, "Brothers and Brothers: the Gay Man's Adaptation to Aging," Diss. Brandeis University, 1974.

environments of our time and place simply do not allow for making meanings concrete. Perhaps no environment containing humans can. Identity, life history or life story, even the category we call Gay, imply the intersection of many uncontrollable and uncomfortable variables. The best we can do is focus dimly. In my task, I have taken identity to be what the people I have talked with said it to be--that is, if someone told me he was defined in some way, I took the person at his word. It may well be that Gay identity is unique among cultural identities along some axis of its self-selecting quality. What it does share with other kinds of identity is its ability to allow other people to feel less alone and provide a sense that they are acting for something larger than themselves.⁶⁸ With such a frame in mind, I then imposed the academy's generic requirement upon the process calling our directed (and sometimes, not so directed) conversations "life stories." Because I wanted to care about the people I met, I felt it necessary to confront what had been written about them.⁶⁹ In the final analysis, though, this entire project was simply a way of my making

⁶⁸. David Bergman, "A Place for the Rest of Us: an Open Letter to Bruce Bawer," Harvard Gay and Lesbian Review, 1(Spring 1994), p.35.

⁶⁹. I used the word "mostly" not to be cranky but rather to acknowledge the reality that given the number of people I spoke with and the quantity of our time together, it would be impossible to be completely caring about them. More on this ambiguity will be discussed in the chapter on field work.

their story a part of my own life story using the conventions I have been taught. My hope in outlining these terms, methods and constructs was to give academic credibility to my real task of "bearing honorable witness to something human."⁷⁰

⁷⁰. Dell Hymes quoted in Henry Glassie, Turkish Traditional Art Today (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), p. 917.

CHAPTER 2: WHAT IS GONE IS STILL HERE

Does it not assume that what is notoriously gone is still here?

Does it answer universal needs? will it improve manners?

--Walt Whitman, Leaves of Grass, "By Blue Ontario's Shores," 12:26-27.

To know what took place summary is enough. To learn what happened requires multiple points of address and analysis.

--Toni Morrison Race-ing Justice, En-gendering Power: Essays on Anita Hill, Clarence Thomas, the Construction of Social Reality, p. xii.

Folklore and history are intertwined. To make sense of history, to make it truly human and not merely an intellectual exercise, folklore is necessary. For folklore to be intelligible, history is necessary, not because history provides a broader "context" but because without the documenting power of history, folklore lacks its obvious underpinning to all culture which makes its importance clear. This interconnection is not a simple case of finding the folklore in history or searching for how folklore can be used in historical analysis for finding "the truth" about what happened. The goal is simultaneously grander and more modest. At the grand level, one hopes to recover the mind of a lost world, lost to the past. And folklore, more than any other aspect of culture allows us to grapple with how people think. More modestly, one seeks to come to terms with how the past informs the present. The past, then, truly becomes a foreign country whose exploration has an immediacy in the

present.

The chronological parameters that I have set out in this dissertation are to some extent arbitrary but they have been dictated by some historical necessity. There will be seepage in both directions. The people I spoke to, and indeed the documentary record, do not lend themselves to neat beginnings and endings. Yet it is clear the first date, 1945, meant the end of one kind of life for the people I portray and the beginning of another. The end date, 1960, is arbitrary in some sense and there is more flexibility here in the conversations than in my starting date. "The sixties" as currently conceptualized were a decade of tremendous change. No one, I think, would argue that the idea of the sixties began at a particular calendar date.¹ Nevertheless, what I am trying to look at is the period before the social revolutions that have come to be known as "the sixties." As one man I spoke with said about the time period that interests me, "it wasn't just Gay life that was different then, the whole world was different."

The usual dividing line in Gay history has been the

¹. My conception of the period is it began with the assassination of John F. Kennedy and ended with the resignation of Richard Nixon. Some basic histories are David Halberstam, The Fifties (New York: Villard Books, 1993), William Manchester, The Glory and the Dream: a Narrative History of America, 1932-1972 (Boston: Little, Brown, 1974), Allen J. Matusow, The Unraveling of America: a History of Liberalism in the 1960s (New York: Harper and Row, 1984) and Harris Wofford, Of Kennedys and Kings: Making Sense of the Sixties (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1980).

Stonewall riots of June 1969 and a good argument might be made for me to have sought material through that year.² But what interests me is an era before the extraordinary changes of the sixties took place, a time before Gays became part of the tumult of the era or influenced by it.

This chapter speaks to the historical concerns of those years. It is important to understand these men in the mix of nascent Gay political movements and in the way America was then. Most of the work on Gay history from the period deals with the emergence of Gay political organizations of various kinds and much emphasis is placed on firsts. This focus is as it should be. Under the circumstances, any attempt by Gays at having a political agenda was courageous. Though my emphasis is less on overt social movements, it is important to include them in this record if the common life of the period is to be understood. And in many instances the most important political statements were made symbolically in social settings by common people.

On virtually every axis of analysis, World War II changed America and the way Americans perceived themselves. And the effects on Gay life cannot be overestimated. Though there may have been prototypical Gays societies in America

². The Stonewall riots function in Gay History as both event and symbol. My view is that the events themselves were not so momentous, Gays had rioted against police abuses before. As a symbol however, so many factors coalesced around the memories of the event that it became a defining moment. See Martin Duberman, Stonewall (New York: Dutton, 1993).

before then, everyone agrees, I think, that World War II stands as a dividing line.³ Every person in the United States was affected by the largest movement of people in the country's history. The war ultimately led to the integration of the races in the armed forces and the integration of the geographic regions to a greater extent than ever before.

The geographic integration of the nation justifies the only border I have set for myself, which is the United States as a whole. It may be arguable but there is good evidence that the tumult of World War II unified American culture to a greater extent than ever before. The mass movements of people broke down regional barriers, and increasingly accessible transportation systems during the era, further created Americans who shared a common culture. The simultaneous expansion of commercial communication systems in television, radio and telephone networks further aided this process. The pot may not have melted but its contents were becoming more blended.

Naturally, the war also affected Gays socially and politically. The most obvious manifestation of the war for Gays was the realization by more of them than ever before that they were not alone but existed in large numbers.

³. George Chauncey's Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture and the Making of the Gay Male World (New York: Basic Books, 1994) is the most thoroughly documented examination of the pre-war era. I think the case he makes about New York cannot be generalized to the country as a whole, however, and occasionally overreaches for New York.

Before the war, Gays were largely separated from one another, except in larger cities, and even in many of them isolation was the norm. The war brought together people of approximately the same age from all over the country. It must also be remembered that on the cusp of the war the United States was largely rural, both in outlook and in statistical reality.⁴ By the end of this era, the representative American was no longer "the farmer behind the plow or the small-town dweller, or even the busy urbanite" but rather the white male suburbanite commuter and his stay-at-home spouse with a seemingly content life.⁵ The reality of course was strikingly different. Obviously there were people who were homosexually inclined in such an environment but as a social phenomenon, it took Gays linking together for the culture to grow. World War II provided such a link on a national scale.⁶ There were also strong political and

⁴. Census of Population and Housing (1990). Population and Housing Unit Counts: United States (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Commerce, Economics and Statistics Administration, Bureau of the Census, 1992), table 7, Urban and Rural Population: 1790-1990, pp. 7-8.

⁵. Bernard Bailyn, et. al., The Great Republic: a History of the American People, Fourth edition, vol. 2 (Lexington, MA: D.C. Heath and Co., 1992), p. 482.

⁶. Allan Bérubé, Coming Out Under Fire: The History of Gay Men and Women in World War II (New York: Free Press, 1990) provides the necessary chronological foundation for my work and the argument about the importance of World War II. On the role of social networks in migration see John S. MacDonald and Leatrice MacDonald, "Chain Migration, Ethnic Neighborhood Formation and Social Networks," The Milbank Memorial Fund Quarterly, 17(1964), pp. 82-97.

medical currents to be dealt with by Gays at that juncture. Homosexuality was still seen as a disease by many medical professionals, psychiatrists leading the pack. As a result, overt homosexuals were excluded from the armed forces. During the war several investigations had the goal to rooting out homosexuals that had somehow slipped through the induction process. A touching moment in Before Stonewall is recalled by one of General Eisenhower's aides. She was asked to investigate the presence of Lesbians in her WAC battalion. She merely pointed out to the General that the numbers were quite large, these were highly decorated women and that she herself was a Lesbian. Eisenhower had the sense to rescind the order.⁷ This anecdote reveals a lot about the situation in which Gays found themselves in the World War II era. Clearly they had found each other in numbers larger than they had ever imagined, were growing cohesive and yet had to be secretive and somewhat defensive in their posture vis-à-vis social institutions. It also indicates that the military found it expedient to let them stay in the armed forces in wartime when there was a great need for military personnel. When peace came in 1945 such expediency went by the wayside and they were expelled in much larger numbers with only a slight reduction during the Korean conflict.

⁷. Andrea Weiss and Greta Schiller. Before Stonewall: The Making of a Gay and Lesbian Community, An Illustrated Historical Guide to the Emmy-Award Winning Film (Tallahassee, Florida: Naiad Press, 1988), pp.34-35.

Their defensiveness was necessary for good reason. After the war, the United States government began a forty year obsession with communism.⁸ In its earliest manifestation during the forties and fifties, this obsession had direct consequences for its own citizens. The government systematically sought to eliminate communists, suspected or otherwise, not just from the government itself but from any position from which a message considered subversive might be communicated.⁹ The difficulty for the government was that there was no uniform definition of subversion. Lacking a cohesive policy, the government's power was continually being shifted among the various players. With no coherent policy on the relationship between first amendment rights and subversion, the country was an easy target for demagogues. They appeared in the form of Richard Nixon and most directly in Joseph McCarthy. It must be kept in mind however, they were only opportunists. The anti-communist feeling promoted by virtually every politician of the time was such that it cannot be surprising that men such as McCarthy and Nixon were able to take the stage.

⁸. So the bias in what follows is made clear, I must admit my own political point of view. I have never strictly speaking been a communist but I have participated in and supported organizations that are on the extreme left in American politics though in Europe they would be labelled social democratic.

⁹. Even my father who was then an innocuous student at Julliard was questioned by the FBI. He never quite knew why but suspected it had to do with the fact that he had signed some petitions for Henry Wallace.

This environment made conformity into a god. And in fact, the image of the time is one of a kind of family life that was vigorously promoted at the time by the media in all its forms. It is for good reason that the names "Ozzie and Harriet" conjure up an entire world view that encapsulates the way the United States saw itself then and remembers the era. If "Ozzie and Harriet" provided the fantasy, perhaps Bernstein's 1952 opera of family conflict and social climbing businessmen, "Trouble in Tahiti," might be seen as a check on reality.¹⁰

Homosexuals, of course, made easy targets. In fact, one major epithet attached to them, "queer," was synonymous with non-conformity. The connection between homosexuals and communism was never very logical. The excuse was that homosexuals belonged in the nebulous, general category of security risk. The shift in the conceptualization of Gays as mentally ill during the war era to the post war era notion of them being security risks was a vague one. Anyone who was a security risk was potentially undermining the government. Using the psychiatric theories of the era, homosexuals were security risks because they were imagined to be inherently unstable or subject to blackmail. Several investigations took place within executive agencies; both the House and

¹⁰. Bernstein provides a nice irony in his 1983 update to "Trouble in Tahiti." "A Quiet Place" features the neglected, largely ignored son of the earlier work as a troubled adult Gay man.

Senate included homosexuals as targets as part of their own investigations into communism and in fact the Senate conducted separate investigations into "Employment of Homosexuals and Other Sex Perverts in Government."¹¹

Even in eras of repression and conformity, however, other impulses emerge. Many responded out of overt political concern, sometimes with, sometimes without a defensive posture. For most Gays defining themselves politically in a public way was never going to be considered seriously. Nevertheless, I think, most Gays did resist the political oppression of the time, perhaps not overtly, by their participation in social circles whose members were by their actions creating an alternative to stifling conformity.

Against incredible odds, three organizations came into being in that era that did have overt political concerns.¹²

¹¹. Martin Duberman excerpts and provides commentary on the report, 81st Cong., 2nd sess., Document 241, in About Time: Exploring the Gay Past, Revised and expanded edition (New York: Meridian, 1991), pp. 177-185. For an example of the consequences of the witch hunts in a Congressional agency see Louise S. Robbins, "The Library of Congress and Federal Loyalty Programs, 1947-1956: No 'Communists or Cocksuckers,'" The Library Quarterly, 64(1994), pp. 365-385. Also see Daniel J. Robinson and David Kimmel, "The Queer Career of Homosexual Security Vetting in Cold War Canada," Canadian Historical Review, 75(1994), pp. 319-345.

¹². John D'Emilio, Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States, 1940-1970 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983) provides a definitive history of these organizations, their interactions with each other and the government, and the basis for this section of this chapter. For a fascinating analysis on relationships among Gay political organizations at the micro level, in this case appropriately Philadelphia, see Marc Stein, "Sex Politics in the City of Sisterly and

These were the Mattachine Society, the Daughters of Bilitis, and ONE. Each had different objectives and they varied in the ways in which they sought to promote change but during the 1950's they did work together on several occasions. Initially the most radical, at least in its self-conception, was the Mattachine Society which began formation in the fall of 1950. Its founder, Harry Hay, was connected to various left-wing causes of the day and had a sophisticated understanding of Marxist theory.¹³ His conception of the situation of Gays and the discussions that arose in the early years of the Society gave intellectual credence to the idea that homosexuals were a social minority deserving political consideration. As an organization it met in secret mostly, which, given the times, is understandable. In fact, it has been likened to secret societies like the masons. It did however confront public issues such as police harassment. By 1954 conflicts within the organization over the issue of maintaining a radical posture as opposed to one where assimilation with the larger society was the goal drove the Mattachine into a decline from which it never

Brotherly Loves," Radical History Review, 59(1994), pp. 60-92. Also see Eric Marcus, Making History: the Struggle for Gay and Lesbian Rights, 1945-1990: an Oral History (New York: Harper Collins, 1992) which includes many of the early figures in the postwar movement.

¹³. See Stuart Timmons, The Trouble With Harry Hay: Founder of the Modern Gay Movement (Boston: Alyson Publications, 1990).

regained its initial vitality.

For the folklorist, the choice of the term Mattachine is interesting for its historical antecedents and the social ramifications of such a decision. The selection of the term 'mattachine' came from Harry Hay's research into traditional music and festival events. Evidently, during the late Renaissance there were all-male bands of troupers who parodied methods of warfare or satirized the politics of the time. The term "mattachine" was adopted from cognates in several romance languages that were attached to these groups.¹⁴ Clearly, by adopting a term loaded with historical resonance, Hay was making a move toward intellectual legitimacy.

The Daughters of Bilitis (DOB) also chose to take their name from folk sources, Bilitis being a mythological female counterpart to Baal in Northwest Semitic mythology. This goddess was linked to lesbians by a late nineteenth century french writer whose work had circulated clandestinely among lesbians since its original publication in 1894.¹⁵ Founded in 1955 by Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon, DOB like Mattachine shared conflicts over basic issues of accommodation or confrontation with larger society. Its lasting contribution,

¹⁴. Timmons, pp. 129-130. The OED2 confirms Hay's etymologies.

¹⁵. Evelyn Gettone [pseud.?], "Bilitis," Encyclopedia of Homosexuality, ed. by Wayne Dynes (New York: Garland Publishing, 1990), pp. 136-137.

however, was its sixteen year long publication of The Ladder. This magazine varied in frequency and in its politics during those sixteen years but because many of the cornerstone issues and concerns of a newly emerging feminism were debated in its pages it deserves thorough reading. It is also profitable as a source on the more common day-to-day concerns of lesbians.

The only organization of the three to last to the present is ONE, Inc.¹⁶ Its survival might be attributed to the fact that it functioned with more modest goals. ONE was and is primarily a publishing and education concern. At first, there was considerable overlap in membership with the Mattachine but over time the groups became more and more distinct. ONE's major political concern was over police harrassment of Gay men and it published regularly on the issue. Like DOB, its magazine, also titled ONE, became one of the most important continous documentary records of Gay life during the fifties. It had articles on all aspects of the life and though overall it was combative in tone, many points of view were represented. Of the Gay periodicals of the time, its circulation was the largest, being about 5,000 an issue. The one important legal victory of the era for Gays was due to a challenge by ONE. The Los Angeles postmaster had siezed issues of the magazine declaring it

¹⁶. A complete history and documentary record of its activities is Homophile Studies in Theory and Practice, ed. by W. Dorr Legg (San Francisco: GLB Publishers, 1994).

obscene. After a lengthy battle in the courts, the Supreme Court in January 1958 overruled the decision of lower courts and allowed ONE to circulate through the mail.¹⁷

These groups left behind a political legacy and the forms debates would take in the Gay community until well after Stonewall. The issues they sought to raise remain basic even today--questions of separatism or assimilation, civil rights of homosexuals, the nature of gender conformity. Increasingly, Gays and Lesbians are realizing the debt owed to these pioneers who explored and expanded the realm that was available to them during the forties and fifties.

For the majority of Gay people in the fifties, indifference toward or ignorance about Mattachine, Daughters of Bilitis or ONE, Inc. was the norm. In the day-to-day life of Gay men of the period other social and cultural outlets predominated which will be explained later.¹⁸ For others, struggling with their sexual identity, it was a time of

¹⁷. D'Emilio, Sexual Politics, p. 115.

¹⁸. I deliberately chose men to interview who were NOT involved in any overt political organization. Not so much because I thought people who were would be unhelpful or uninteresting for the material I was looking for, but rather because I wanted to be sure that no overt ideology was going to complicate their memories. To be sure, ideology plays a covert role in the lives of most people. In this instance, however, of doing more or less quick and dirty field work, I wanted as "normal" as sample of the group as possible and that meant finding men who were not explicitly political.

tortuous self-examination and blind denial.¹⁹

The vast majority of Gays who did participate in Gay life did so, either in deliberately well-defined Gay places that were as safe as could be made, or claimed public spaces for socializing and meeting sexual partners. The predominant mode by which Gays created safe zones was parties. If there is one social event that typifies this period for Gay men it is the parties that they attended with their fellows.

Another characteristic of the time was the use of public restrooms in transportation facilities and parks to find sexual liaisons. Parks were also places for socializing and making new friends. I will go into more details about these features of Gay life in a later chapter but suffice it to say for now that I interviewed people from all over the United States, or who had lived all over the country and these two features were a common denominator in their experiences.

In parks particularly police harrassment was a constant threat. But even in the privacy of their own homes Gays had to be cautious. The parks were subject to surveillance by the police or by thugs. Since in many places, there were laws making it illegal for two men to dance together or have

¹⁹. Two accounts of individual struggles from the fifties are Martin Duberman's autobiographical Cures: A Gay Man's Odyssey (New York: Dutton, 1991) and Calvin Trillin's ethereal evocation of his Yale classmate Roger Hansen, Remembering Denny (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1993).

more than fleeting physical contact, occasionally Gays were even targeted in their own homes. Often such intrusions were initiated by spiteful neighbors or at the insistence of the FBI.

And of course there were the bars. The definitive history of Gay bars has yet to be written, and, in fact, it is surprising that given the importance they have had in Gay life to this day there is little of significance written about them. Though they existed long before World War II in one form or another it was in the post war era that they developed into the important institution they have become.. No one knows when the first Gay bar appeared. What we do know is that as early as the eighteenth century various pubs in London and elsewhere became known for men with homosexual interests. Did these pubs produce community? We simply do not know. By the early twentieth century these became a known commodity in larger cities in the United States. They were not exactly common but they were no longer extraordinary either. The average person did not know of their existence, but undoubtedly the police did, as did those who were more savvy about the variety of urban life. By the 1930's many Gay bars did, in fact, become institutions. Several founded during the thirties stayed in business for more than thirty years. Of course, in many instances the owners paid a price to the police, the mafia or both, for the right to operate but the key point is they

increasingly became part of a normative urban scene in the United States.

More explicitly sexual in nature were the bathhouses. These institutions had their roots in public baths, sometimes called turkish baths after the style of their decor, that were common in urban areas before household plumbing became the norm. Of course, in antiquity the scene of the Roman bath was characterized as licentious. In the early twentieth century, in America, baths were characterized by their ethnic, immigrant origins. It was inevitable that places where men were in various states of nakedness, would become locations of sexual encounters between them.²⁰ At what point baths began to directly cater to homosexuals is unclear. By the end of the forties, however, there certainly were bathhouses that were distinctly Gay in New York, Philadelphia, San Francisco and elsewhere.

For the most of the United States Gays remained truly queer. Unseen, largely unspoken of, they were never more than the occasional name in a police blotter in the newspaper or the target of paranoid politicians. There were occasions, however, when the threat of Gay nonconformity became too much of a strain for most Americans to bear. In

²⁰. George Chauncey, Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture and the Making of the Gay World, 1890-1940 (New York: Basic Books, 1994), pp. 207-225 is titled "The Social World of the Baths" and details the early history of the institution.

Boise, Idaho the paranoia clearly got out of hand in 1955. In a successful move to rid Boise of a reformist city government, a wealthy elite used accusations of homosexuality as a means of demonstrating the corruption of the city under an administration that promoted change.²¹ In many instances civil liberties were disregarded. Gays were questioned about their social circles in an atmosphere that has rightly been described as a witch-hunt. Nine men were ultimately sent to prison merely for being Gay with terms lasting as long as fifteen years.

Many more egregious examples of persecution of Gays could be given. All over the country, newspaper reports of how homosexuals tempted "normals" were common, as were police raids of gathering spots. In retrospect, events and documents such as these are offensive and infuriating to our contemporary sensibilities. However, I think by focusing on them we ignore the common resistance most Gays demonstrated in their everyday gatherings. By establishing social networks of various kinds, Gays were able to carve out an alternative world for themselves that was not controlled by or obvious to the stifling society of the time. Though not explicitly acknowledging the political nature of such gatherings, two sociologists recognized the significance of these networks. In a 1956 article in the journal Social

²¹. John Gerassi, The Boys of Boise (New York: Macmillan, 1966).

Problems (I would raise the question "problems for whom? and by whom?") they describe the small world created by about sixty men. They create a typology of these men, dividing them into secret and overt groups. Both groups, though devising different methods, demonstrate strategies for creating community.²²

For Gay people the most influential book of the era on a Gay topic was The Homosexual in America written pseudonymously by Edward Sagarin under the name Donald Webster Cory. This admittedly subjective treatise is comprehensive and covers the major issues confronting homosexuals of the time both socially and politically. His strongest argument pleads for the homosexual to be seen as a minority that does not choose its status and is deserving of its civil rights. Descriptions of Gay social life of the period make it a useful resource for my purposes, but the most astonishing aspect of the book is the fact that many of the issues he raises remain important today. He shares this characteristic with the more overt political organizations though it is likely that his book reached many more people.

Most mental health professionals saw homosexuality as an illness and their view predominated until well after the

²². Maurice Leznoff and William A. Westley, "The Homosexual Community," Social Problems, 3(1956), pp. 257-263. Though describing a Canadian group, I think much of the article is relevant to Gay experience of the time in the United States as well. It also has some fascinating and rare quotes from Gays of the period.

1950's. Yet, even then, at least one voice stood in opposition to that idea. Evelyn Hooker, a UCLA psychologist, took an approach that now seems like common sense. Her research focused on homosexuals who were not in therapy whereas most psychiatric or psychological research up to that point had looked at those homosexuals who had sought therapy or been institutionalized. Her classic article, "The Adjustment of the Male Overt Homosexual," found a homosexual population that did not come from a therapeutic setting and compared it to a similar group of heterosexual males using a variety of standardized psychological tests. The results indicated there were no significant differences between the two groups. When the study was read in 1956, it was revolutionary, leading to an entirely novel approach to the study of Gays.²³

Gays, of course, were not the only ones during the late forties and fifties to work against the conservatism of the time. Probably the greatest important social change came through successful court challenges over civil rights for African Americans. Against the wishes of the Republican administration, the Supreme Court initiated change in the entire social structure of the United States in its decision in Brown vs. the Board of Education. After that decision "separate but equal" could no longer be the hypocritical

²³. Journal of Projective Techniques, 21(1957), pp. 18-31.

battle cry of segregationists in education.

Women, too, were able, with some effort, to resist being restricted by a cultural norm they found confining. The image of Donna Reed and Harriet Nelson as the perfect mother and wife is the one most of us carry in our heads of the typical fifties woman.²⁴ And, in fact, it was a time of young families with high birthrates. It was called the "baby boom" for good reason. The peak came in 1957 when more children were born than in any other year in the nation's history. Yet, women did not forget the role they played in the war effort and the alternative options available to them. An expanding economy demanded that more women enter the workforce, even in peace time. The reality remained, however, that most of these jobs were largely in the lower paying service sector. Nevertheless, by 1960, 40 percent of the waged-work force was female as opposed to 25 percent in 1940.

Even popular culture often focused on issues other than normalcy. The now-dated science fiction films of the time, for example, were often not very subtle reflections of general anxiety about the threat of nuclear war and racial conflict. James Dean, of course, was an immensely controversial figure portraying the existential dilemmas of young people of the period. That fact that he displayed an

²⁴. Nina C. Leibman, Living Room Lectures: the Fifties Family in Film and Television (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995).

ambiguous yet forceful sexuality made him an icon of a fifties type that remains potent to this day. Elvis Presley emerged during the fifties. The overt sexual nature of his performance style and his blending of white and black blues traditions signal an alternative to Pat Boone. Presley was immensely popular and though it might be said that his appropriation of black music and dancing was racist, without attribution and almost never paying royalties, it also had the effect of bringing that music into the mainstream.²⁵

The Beats, too, dealt with growing up with existential angst in an era typified by the organization man. Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg and William Burroughs' work all represent a different reality of the fifties than represented in Life magazine. Each wrote about the alienation of being different, the necessity for continual experimentation to stay alive and the uncertain nature of being human. To some extent, each was a drifter who confronted their time by exploring aspects of the human psyche that baffled most of the public. If James Dean's Rebel Without a Cause is the quintessential fifties movie, then Kerouac's On the Road is similarly its representative book. Neither has lost their appeal to the young in the past

²⁵. Greil Marcus has provided the underpinning for these thoughts on Elvis (note that it is not even necessary to use his last name) in his Mystery Train: Images of America in Rock 'n' Roll Music, revised edition, (New York: Dutton, 1982) and Dead Elvis: a Chronicle of a Cultural Obsession (New York: Doubleday, 1991).

forty years. Ginsberg still draws enormous crowds when he gives readings and if his odes on male orgasms are less shocking today than they were forty years ago it is only because he is partly responsible for the change. The fact that the Beats also encouraged sexual experimentation, even the aggressively macho Kerouac, also makes them relevant to this dissertation. While I Love Lucy and Father Knows Best are still rerun on television, they become meaningful largely in the contrast they present to Kerouac and Dean. When seen together, all these images from popular culture demonstrate the complexity of an era not easily reduced to a single photograph or television show. The men I met further aid our understanding of that complexity and work against reduction of the era to a single image.

CHAPTER 3: MOVE IN ORDER

Thou pulse--thou motive of the stars, suns, systems,
That, circling, move in order, safe, harmonious,
Athwart the shapeless vastnesses of space.

--Walt Whitman, Leaves of Grass, "Passage to India," 8:27-29

Sexual Perversion. (HQ71-78): see also Exhibitionism; Homosexuality; Masochism; Nymphomania; Sadism; Sex Crimes; Transvestism.

Homosexuality: (Social pathology, HQ76) Works on the criminal manifestation of homosexuality are entered under the heading Sodomy.

Subject Headings Used in the Dictionary Catalogs of the Library of Congress. Fifth and Sixth editions. 1948 and 1957.

In the past twenty years there has been enormous growth in research about Gay culture and history. The study of Gay peoples was once the province of rabid homophobes, closeted academics or scholars writing without institutional affiliations or constraints. Increasingly, Gay studies is becoming part of the institutional life of the academy. Virtually every major academic association has a section devoted to sexual minorities. There have been famous conferences at Yale, Rutgers and elsewhere. Several journals are now devoted to the topic when as recently as 1970 there was only The Journal of Homosexuality. With the incorporation of queer studies the focus is also on examining the humanities through queer vantage points and through queer eyes.

Folklore scholars, too, have demonstrated increasing interest in Gay and Lesbian topics. Since folklore in the

United States is a small discipline, this work has not generated the kind of publicity more established fields have. Nevertheless, it has a vitality and contribution worth noting. It shares a commonality with Gay studies in that both have been marginalized in academia and both have included "non-professionals" as part of their community of scholars. What follows, then, is an encounter with the literature of folklore scholarship about Gays. I have limited my response to work I have found most interesting or work from other areas that is important enough and is related to folklore to be incorporated into the larger folklore discipline.¹

The relationship of those studying Gay folklore to the broader discipline is also relevant. Though in retrospect, folklore's founders in the United States might rightly be judged paternalistic, the mission they gave to their discipline still resonates today. Their intentions, also recognizable as mixed at best (as if scholars could be exempt from the human conundrum of mixed motives), also serve as underpinning to my enterprise. When establishing The Journal of American Folklore, the classic statement of purpose heralded the romantic call. The concern was to preserve what were perceived to be the fast vanishing

¹. For a more comprehensive bibliography see Joseph P. Goodwin, More Man than You'll Ever Be: Gay Folklore and Acculturation in Middle America, pp. 111-120, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989).

traditions of several key populations within the United States: the remnants of old Yankee stock, American negroes, Indian tribes.² Their statement is important because it demonstrates their continuity with folklore scholars today and the relevance of their perspective and the issues they chose to confront.

Folklore's historic concerns are for populations outside the perceived mainstream of society. In Europe, this focus primarily meant peasants; in the United States, ethnic groups and other minorities as well are added to the dynamic. When scholars from the literary disciplines became involved with folklore they invariably either encountered canonical literature such as Beowulf or the Canterbury Tales in a new light or went into the field themselves in search of new or supplementary material. Likewise, anthropologists, already mandated to explore crevices of human experience unknown to the academy, often sought folklore as a mediating device between cultures or as entry point into broader concerns about culture.

The other historic continuity in folklore scholarship in addition to working with marginalized peoples has been to examine generic systems. In fact, for some, the very definition of the discipline itself hinges on the ability of

². William Wells Newell, "On the Field and Work of a Journal of American Folk-Lore," Journal of American Folk-Lore, 1(1888), pp. 3-7. The names for the groups are Newell's. I have also preserved Victorian usage "folk-lore."

scholars to delineate and define all the folklore genres. Today it is more commonly recognized that "ethnic genres are cultural modes of communication, analytic categories are models for the organization of texts" and realize that the difficulty of folklore scholars to make sense of native categories is their own, not that of the people they study--the native ability for "perception, distinction or abstraction" exists with or without the folklore scholar.³ Though most generic analysis has been concerned with oral genres, the same insights apply to festival events and other folkloric performances.

To be sure, folklorists and others looking at Gay folklore have not been primarily moved by preservationist, revivalist or romanticizing tendencies. Nor are they extensively concerned with distinctions between analytic categories and ethnic genres. Both features can be seen in earlier scholarship but are certainly not its focus. My work, however, does attend to these issues more explicitly. Not surprisingly, when Gay scholarship and folklore intersect, the dominant views about homosexuality are foregrounded.

The earliest impetus for the study of Gay folklore was motivated by the famous study sponsored by the Committee for

³. Dan Ben-Amos, "Analytical Categories and Ethnic Genres," in Folklore Genres, pp. 215-242. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1976.

the Study of Sex Variants. This study, Sex Variants: a Study of Homosexual Patterns, was the first large scale social science inquiry into the lives of Gays and Lesbians.⁴ Funds were raised, in part, by Gay people to support the research, which was led primarily by medical doctors. Today, the transcription of the interviews and the accompanying analysis seem quaint. Nevertheless, the study provides a documentary window in the lives of homosexuals during the 1930's that is unique in both its content and its detail. For the folklorist, if read properly, it is a trove of material for understanding the aesthetics of Gay men of the pre-war era.

Even more to the point for the folklorist, the committee included a glossary of Gay slang as an appendix. Gershon Legman's "Language of Homosexuality: an American Glossary," is the first publication on a folklore genre with Gays as the focus.⁵ Legman begins with an analysis and

⁴. by George W. Henry, 2 vols., (New York: Paul B. Hoeber, Inc., 1941).

⁵. pp. 1149-1179 in Sex Variants: a Study of Homosexual Patterns, by George W. Henry, (New York: Paul B. Hoeber, Inc., 1941). For reasons I have yet to determine Legman's appendix appeared only in the first 1941 edition of the book. Lists of Gay slang became a cottage industry of sorts (if I may be pardoned this slang allusion) in the next fifty years. See for instance A.F. Niemoeller, "A Glossary of Homosexual Slang," Fact, 2 (Jan.-Feb. 1965), pp. 25-27 and the etymologically-oriented Homolexis: a Historical and Cultural Lexicon of Homosexuality, Gay Saber Monograph, no. 4, (New York: Gay Academic Union, 1985) by Wayne Dynes. It is the most complete and detailed dictionary of words related to homosexuality to date though it is not entirely focused on slang.

history of terms relating to homosexuality from "scientific" discourse including many of words that were used by medicine to come to terms with what was seen as a medical phenomenon. Some of these attempts by the medical profession to describe homosexual acts are quite funny today.⁶ Legman collected about 300 terms used by or about homosexuals in his glossary and suggests that they are exclusively from earlier printed sources that gave access to argot of the "underworld." It is impossible to tell from what he wrote about his glossary whether or not he actually collected terms from oral sources. It seems likely that some of them are, since there is corroborating evidence for them even if Legman did not obtain them in that way. Reading the list it is possible to find terms used in the interviews in the earlier part of the study and many are still used by Gays today.

His presentation of homosexual slang must be seen as part of the existing vision of homosexual culture as an element of society that exists as deviant and pathological from the view of most people of the time. Though the Committee was progressive for its day in even beginning to investigate how homosexuals lived and expressed themselves sexually, the fact remains that the psychiatrists who conducted the interviews held their subjects in mild, if not outright, contempt if the interview summaries are any gauge.

⁶. See, for example, Legman's discussion (p. 1152) of the virtues of the term penilinctus as a male alternative to cunnilingus.

Legman, on the other hand, later revels in the investigation of life--particularly those elements others might find prurient. Nevertheless, his magnum opus, No Laughing Matter: an Analysis of Sexual Humor is constrained and limited by his insistence on Freudian analysis of the jokes he collected and a reduction of the understanding of wit entirely to the realm of unexpressed aggression.⁷ To reduce jokes merely to a few axes of analysis, as he does, is to ignore the creativity involved in one of the richest genres common to human experience. Looking at his work today, it is clear that it shares more in common with others in the psychoanalytic tradition, such as Irving Bieber and Charles Socarides, whose insights have largely been discredited, than it does with folklorists whose ethos has never been inclined to see pathology in others.⁸ Furthermore, he pays virtually no attention to the folklorist's reality that meaning arises in texts in contexts.

Legman's work cannot be dismissed out of hand, however. For one thing, his collection includes hundreds of examples

⁷. I have used the 2 volume 1982 Indiana University Press reprint of the earlier 1968 and 1975 works.

⁸. Though he seems quite open minded writing that "it is not the individual but society that is sick," when it comes to homosexuals all tolerance goes out the window. "At best homosexuality expresses itself compulsively." (vol. 2, p. 55). Referring to a guide to Gay life written in 1971 by a Gay man his judgement is clear: "'Gay' here is obviously the equivalent of sick." (vol. 2, p. 64)

of humor by and about Gays from the era before Stonewall that are otherwise unaccounted for. He also pays attention to the importance of collecting from oral sources, even if when reporting materials he wrenches them from their contexts. Finally, his use of literary sources is extraordinary for its breadth. But his relationship to folklore as a discipline remains problematic. To his credit, he was among the first to risk talking about sexual humor and rightly criticized those in the community of academic folklorists who ignored it. His role as an outsider from the academy no doubt was an asset in this regard. Occasionally, his criticism of folklorists was a bit overdone. How could folklorists of the 1950's escaped being products of their times even if it seems that Legman himself did? It is no surprise that given the middle class backgrounds of most of them, they exhibited more than their share of prudery. Yet Legman did legitimately castigate Stith Thompson, for example, for allowing his value system so completely to overwhelm his scholarship by willfully ignoring the sexual portion of tradition in the Motif-index.

The first article to directly address folklorists appeared in Western Folklore. Norine Dresser's "'The Boys in the Band is Not Another Musical': Male Homosexuals and Their Folklore" is based on research done in early 1971.⁹ Dresser went to the same Gay bar in Los Angeles every Saturday

⁹. Western Folklore, 33(1974), pp. 205-218.

afternoon for four months. Consequently, she was able to get to know the bar's patrons fairly well and collected material in a reasonable approximation of a natural context. Her motivation initially was to look at the folklore of a deviant group for the purpose of examining how folklore can be used by a deviant group for the purposes of relieving stress. Many of the jokes she heard, though different in content, share the same stylistic characteristics and world view as those of the people I interviewed. Perhaps most interesting of all is that she thought she might be viewing a world that was passing away in light of the tremendous changes that were taking place in the early 1970's in the way society viewed homosexuality. Actually, what she observed demonstrates a great degree of continuity in the Gay subculture.

By the time Dresser's article appeared, Gays had become less of a taboo topic among academics and other scholars. The so-called sexual revolution of the late 1960's had changed the way Gays were viewed by most educated people. No longer were Gays solely the province of psychiatrists longing to cure illness or social scientists with an almost voyeuristic concern with deviance. By the early 70's Gays themselves were in a position of enough power to generate a substantial body of scholarly published material to undermine the perspectives of illness and deviance. Some of it was sympathetic to the cause of Gay liberation to the

point of seeming like propaganda but its main impact changed the attitude toward Gays as a topic for research. As is the case with other populations, the folklore of Gays was incorporated as a discussion point for those writing for other disciplines even if the material was not explicitly acknowledged as folklore.

Folklore plays little role in Male Homosexuals: their Problems and Adaptations but the fact that its authors employed ethnographic methodologies makes it relevant.¹⁰ Self-consciously following in the footsteps of the large-scale Kinsey reports of twenty years early, Kinsey's successors at the famous Indiana University institute studied three societies seeking the place homosexuals occupy within them. This study was important for social science because it sought not to make homosexuals appear to be pathological or deviant but merely another population worth studying. Weinberg and Williams investigated Gay society in the United States, the Netherlands and Denmark. Their study was based on field work in all three locations, the goal being an evaluation of how homosexuals were treated in each country, providing data to influence public policy. Using large-survey techniques characteristic of earlier Kinsey studies, they looked at such issues as self-acceptance, living arrangements, religious identification and so on. The

¹⁰. by Martin S. Weinberg and Colin J. Williams (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974).

conclusion was that laws and social reactions in the United States should follow those in Denmark and the Netherlands; that is, toward decriminalization and progressive attempts to make society a safer place for homosexuals.

Weinberg and Williams is a heavily quantified study. For the folklorist it is disappointing that with such large numbers of people interviewed, there is little in the way of first-person voice here. Occasionally quoted material does yield a certain sense of what might be included for the folklorist. For example, the area of Gay bars on Folsom Street in San Francisco is referred to by one respondent as the "miracle mile," indicating a community recognition of an alternative geography. The photographs included, too, are fascinating for the representation of how people dressed and socialized. But Weinberg and Williams acknowledge that the book's abstract quality works in a direction opposite from these photographs, since they "present a group of pictures to bring this world to life for the reader." To be sure, the book is not totally lifeless but its emphasis on the quantitative detracts from its goal of demonstrating to society the need to change attitudes toward homosexuals since it is clear that the best way to reduce prejudice is to show the very human faces of the oppressed. On the other hand, their use of statistics and survey techniques is persuasive for policy makers, the book's primary audience, who might need such data to change laws.

Three monograph length ethnographic works either based on work in the 1970's or appearing in that decade are usefully encountered by folklorists. The most well-known and most controversial was Tearoom Trade by Laud Humphreys.¹¹ Much of the controversy surrounding the book concerned the ethics of his field work practices. Tearrooms are public restrooms that are known to be the locus of homosexual encounters. They have long been a target of law enforcement against public sex. Humphreys' goal was to investigate deviant behavior that existed beyond the boundaries of a subculture--in this case, the homosexual subculture. His methodology was what made the book both innovative and controversial. In retrospect, it does not seem very extraordinary that he went to tearrooms, observed what was going on, interviewed people both on site and off, and also served the role of lookout. All of which to say is that Humphreys became involved in the situation he was researching. In the nineties, such reflexive ethnography does not seem at all irresponsible but at the time it did. He was called to task for having observed criminal acts and not reporting them and violating social scientific standards of objectivity by becoming too directly involved in the research process thus violating the ethical standards of his

¹¹. Enlarged edition (Chicago: Aldine, 1975). This edition has a postscript including several essays about the ethics of the book. For many years Tearoom Trade was used as a discussion topic in fieldwork ethics.

discipline. Remember, though, his subjects were then seen as deviants and criminals, if not outright pariahs and what reporting he did of their behavior was done with amazing sensitivity.

What got lost in the shuffle of the ethical debates was Humphries contribution to our knowledge of this important aspect of Gay life. His conclusion was that tearooms existed for populations outside the Gay subculture to locate homosexual sex. While they serve that function, I think he missed the reality that another one of the main populations they serve is also members of the Gay community itself. For my part, I found his description of tearoom encounters very helpful when interviewing the men in my work. Much of his schema and typologies of roles is not terribly relevant for folklorists since he imposed it from above. Folklorists would be more interested in terminology from the participants. Fortunately, he gives those terms as well and my interviews confirm his ethnographic reporting even if his took place in an unnamed metropolitan area in the early 1960's and mine is provided by memories of men in the nineties of events forty years before. Tearooms are a very important location for Gay men claiming spaces of their own and as such need to be taken seriously. They certainly play a large role in the lives of many and even for those who don't use them as points of sexual contact, they are part of the lore of the culture.

The drag queen is also part of the lore of Gay culture and serves as the focus of Esther Newton's Mother Camp.¹² Today with the popularity of films such as The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert and To Wong Foo, Thanks for Everything, Julie Newmar one could argue, they are part of the lore the larger American culture as well. Newton's ethnography signals a change in attitude toward Gay life among social scientists. It also incorporates many of the concerns of folklorists. Her interviews took her to many American cities in the late 1960's and rather than having a goal of "understanding deviance" she sought to understand drag queens on their own terms.¹³ As a moral shift, this maneuver was brilliant since it gave voice to a segment of the population that is marginalized even its own Gay community thereby increasing real understanding of the cultural role of her population. She demonstrates, therefore, that communities are not separate entities but rather overlapping ones. For folklorists, her heightened awareness leading her to recognize the verbal, cultural and performance distinctions of drag queens, serves as a forerunner to the film "Paris is Burning"--a film about drag balls in Harlem, in which folklorists did, in fact, take

¹². Esther Newton, Mother Camp: Female Impersonators in America (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979).

¹³. I would also point out that her work supports my contention in the previous chapter that there was noticeable continuity in Gay life from city to city.

part.

Another institution which is integral to Gay life, of course, is the Gay bar. Curiously, there is little serious ethnographic literature about Gay bars. The most detailed study looked at a bar in "Port City." Admirably, Kenneth Read did not choose to examine a middle-class Gay bar.¹⁴ Instead, his bar, "The Columbia," was in a seedy part of town and its regulars were people who were marginalized in the Gay world. He sees the bar as a scene for acting out different roles and providing an alternative community even if it is an unstable one. The detailed description of the people and the layout of the bar is unique in ethnography. There simply is no other work that goes into the detail in quite the same way. Although his bar is singular, there are similar bars in many other cities in the United States and they were certainly there in the period I examined.

What makes Read's work most appealing, however, is the way he integrated his own personality into the process. Unlike other ethnographies he has no objection to including his own voice with his "other voices." While it is clear that there are aspects of this place he finds objectionable, at the same time he finds many of the people to be admirable for their resilience. He also makes it clear that anthropologists need to overcome their reluctance to examine

¹⁴. Other Voices: the Style of a Male Homosexual Tavern (Novato, CA: Chandler and Sharp, 1980).

homosexuality in culture if they are to accurately encounter culture. It must be said that anthropologists have come a long way since Read did his field work in the 1970's. He is also clear about the social and political ramifications of his work and the need to be sure it is taken seriously as social criticism. It would have been easy for him to have become mawkish here, but fortunately he remains humanely connected.

As a thoughtful anthropologist, Read also attends to material that is of interest to folklorists. For instance, his analogies of Gay put-down routines to the African American dozens are interesting if incomplete. What he missed, I think, is the differing motivations for the process as well as the topical differences. He does, however, give accounts of these verbal encounters, which itself is rare in the literature. Moreover, he details many verbal genres of the bar and other kinds of performance features. Read is more concerned than I am with role designations but his honest and clear description of the bar's patrons is very helpful in understanding the continuity of Gay life in the era between the past I am studying and the present.

About the time Read was doing his field work, the discipline of speech communication regularly started publishing on Gay topics and many of these papers were on subjects directly related to folklore. Gayspeak collected

much of this work from the 1970s.¹⁵ The title paper was meant to delineate the forms of discourse that took place among Gays that distinctly marked the boundaries between them and other groups. It set forth a typology of the settings in which gayspeak occurred labelling them as activist, social and secret. Other articles examined metacommunication systems among Gay people that are relevant to my work. While most of the material was more directly related to overt political discourse in the mass media, several authors dealt with "communication in small groups" that linked them to folklorists.

A more idiosyncratic view is taken by Judy Grahn in Another Mother Tongue: Gay Words, Gay Worlds.¹⁶ Her suggestive work cannot be dismissed as idiosyncratic in any pejorative sense, however, for several reasons. First, Grahn, more than any author before or since, directly addresses the folklore issues that Gay people themselves ask. Such questions as why did lavender come to be associated with Gays? how do body markings relate to being Gay? what is the connection of Gays with shamanism? how do Gay people claim their role in past cultures in both the

¹⁵. Gayspeak: Gay Male and Lesbian Communication, James W. Cheesebro, ed. (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1981).

¹⁶. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984). Another etymological approach is taken by Wayne Dynes, Homolexis (cited earlier). More self-consciously a dictionary on the OED model, it is like Grahn speculative. It also includes a bibliography of linguistic research on Gay topics.

West and the East? Believe me, these are questions that Gay people still ask no matter what their social or economic status. Another Mother Tongue is a book that still resonates directly with the cultural concerns of Gays.¹⁷ Her work, while speculative, cannot be ignored for another reason that connects it to folklore. Like other groups, Gays, too, have been interested in demonstrating their antiquity as a means of validating their contemporary contributions. This political use of folklore can be seen over and over again and has been thoroughly documented especially in nineteenth century Europe when many countries were in their nation-building (or consolidating) modes. Grahn's work is situated within a particular moment in Gay consciousness building that is very similar to the period of the nineteenth century folklorists that saw such figures as Sabine Baring-Gould and the Grimms write about the antiquity of their cultures. And in fact, Grahn mines the same classical sources they did. The weak link in her work is also the same as that of the other so-called antiquarians. Namely, connections to the distant past are almost always impossible to demonstrate conclusively. "The Key to All Mythologies" will have to remain unwritten. But my main point is still valid. Because

¹⁷. As I was writing this, the topic of what constituted Gay culture came up on GAYNET, a national electronic bulletin board. One reader posted the message "for those needing remediation in Gay Culture, I would suggest "Another Mother Tongue," by Judy Grahn--all about gay slang, customs and traditions both serious and frivolous." (9 Dec 1994).

Grahn speaks directly to the psychic concerns of Gay people she must be taken seriously.

Folklorists also increasingly became aware of Gays as a potential group for research during the 1970's and early 1980's. Dresser's article was likely not an influence in this regard but more a precursor. Bryan Knedler noted the paradox of the role of campy, effeminate men in the Gay community in that they are simultaneously despised and admired by middle-class participants in the community.¹⁸ His in-depth study of a particular individual in the Columbus Gay world is noteworthy for being the sole example of a performer-oriented portrayal of the folklore skills of a Gay person. It also foregrounds power issues in performance demonstrating how folklore operates within the community and as a boundary marker.

Undoubtedly, the person who is most responsible for bringing Gays to the consciousness of folklorists is Joseph P. Goodwin.¹⁹ As a graduate student at Indiana University, under Richard Dorson he wrote a dissertation that evolved into More Man than You'll Ever Be: Gay Folklore and

¹⁸. "Performance and Power in the Gay Male Community," M.A. Thesis. Ohio State University, 1983. The advisor was Patrick Mullen.

¹⁹. I must in all honesty point out that Joe is a friend of mine and whatever disagreements we might have over issues in the scholarship it is impossible (and, for that matter, irresponsible) for me to separate the friendship from the issues.

Acculturation in Middle America.²⁰ Probably more important than his scholarship, however, have been the ways in which he has made it impossible for folklorists to forget that Gays exists (which many would like to do, I am sure). Virtually every year since he was a graduate student at Indiana, he has given a paper at the annual meeting of the American Folklore Society (AFS) on a Gay topic and these have been well-attended. Furthermore, he has organized panels on sexual minorities at AFS and served as its conscience in matters of social justice, particularly at the 1993 meetings in Oregon--a state that had just then gone through terrible battles over the civil rights of Gays.

The title of Goodwin's work is, of course, a traditional Gay come back to a put down. What Goodwin portrays is a verbal community with considerable skill. These skills make clear several important issues within Gay life, thus his emphasis is on the functions of folklore within Gay society. He demonstrates how specific jokes and verbal customs serve as markers as members of the Gay community. He also examines how they raise concerns about social issues of concern to Gays. Issues of boundary-making between Gays and straights are foregrounded. Perhaps more interestingly, issues of race and gender conflict are also raised. Questions about the role of misogynist and racist humor within the Gay world are serious and almost always

²⁰. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989).

ignored.²¹

The main thrust of the book is that Gay folklore has unique characteristics among the possible folklores that allow a member of Gay society to differentiate insiders from outsiders via expressive culture.²² These forms of folklore are commonly jokes, camp, and types of personal experience narrative that are unique to the Gay community. The coming-out narrative is the primary example of this last category. By participating in these forms and becoming skilled at them, Goodwin argues, Gay men become acculturated to their social group. Since he was based in Bloomington, Indiana, he also points out that his research and fieldwork were not done in coastal Gay culture (places such as New York, San Francisco, and Los Angeles) which are more commonly the locales of research. Rather, he gives a portrait of another kind of Gay community--one that is more isolated in the larger society and one that has fewer social services and institutions available to it. He makes a real contribution. It is almost a cliché to recognize the reality of the multiplicity of Gay communities but this recognition is usually drawn in urban environments. Goodwin demonstrated the vitality of Gay life in the rural midwest, albeit a

²¹. What is one to make, for example, of the imitation of black women in a campy manner by younger Gays which is very common today?

²². Much of what follows here is from my review of Goodwin in International Folklore Review, 8(1991), p. 130.

large university town there. The ways of being Gay in this environment need much more exploration.

What is lacking in Goodwin's work is the subtle sense of what these lives are like and how expressive culture is enacted within them. If folklore is to make a contribution to the discourse of what it means to be human it is necessary to move beyond an text-and-analysis approach. He also tries to do too much. One small example is a sort of folk linguistics where he tries to describe Gay intonation patterns. There is simply not enough data here to support anything but superficial conclusions.²³ Nevertheless, Goodwin has made a pioneering contribution providing me with an outstanding model for my own scholarship.

Goodwin's example has not only influenced me, but much more impressively, led to a presidential address at a major folklore society. Venetia Newall explicated Gay folklore in her 1986 address to the Folklore Society (London).²⁴ She surveys Gay folklore from the past several centuries particularly noting the difficulty of researching a social group that is essentially secretive, as she puts it. By

²³. Linguists have begun to look at this question and I do not mean to suggest that it is unimportant. See for example Rudolf P. Gaudio, "Sounding Gay: Pitch Properties in the Speech of Gay and Straight Men," American Speech, 69(1994), pp. 30-57.

²⁴. Published as "Folklore and Male Homosexuality," Folklore, 97(1986), pp. 123-147. Honesty requires that I point out that I consider Newall, like Goodwin, a friend and that she has been very supportive of my work and career.

pulling together diverse sources from literature and journalistic accounts of Gays across time and space, she demonstrates the outlines of Gay folklore that exist to this day: the visual cues necessary for identifying one another, the esoteric-exoteric factors in Gay jokes, and nature of gender-bending in group humor. I think she overplays the hiddenness of Gay life although her acknowledgement of the difficulties of doing research among Gays as an outsider seems right.

Folklore scholarship is becoming more politically conscious in general, and the study of Gays by folklorists is no exception. Goodwin pinpoints the role of defiance in Gay humor.²⁵ Virtually every article in a special issue of New York Folklore devoted to "Prejudice and Pride: Lesbian and Gay Traditions in America" has political analysis as a key element in its explication.²⁶

The articles cover a many cogent topics and are suggestive of further work. Leonard Primiano looks at the lived experience of a Gay Roman Catholic group, Dignity, exploring ways in which Gays and Lesbians seek community and spirituality in an institution that is often quite hostile.

²⁵. Joseph P. Goodwin, "Humour and Conflict in The Gay World," International Folklore Review, 4(1986), pp. 96-99.

²⁶. The editors see three themes in Gay folklore: sexuality, spirituality and authenticity. Deborah Blincoe and John Forrest, eds., New York Folklore: a special issue; Prejudice and Pride: Lesbian and Gay Traditions in America, 19(1993), nos. 1-2.

Dana Heller brings Hothead Paisan, a Lesbian comic book, to the fore as a source of lesbian humor and folklore. In a similar literary mode, Jimmy Browning uses Armistead Maupin's Tales of the City novels to understand aspects of folklore in the Gay Community. A highly experimental article by Charles Bergengren takes a look at the material culture of a Gay man's apartment in New York and the interaction of Gay men more generally with the material world.

Festival behavior is also a common topic among folklorists today and the very word "festive" has Gay connotations. So it is no surprise that Halloween, long a traditional festive holiday for Gays, is the topic of several recent books and articles. In some cities Gays are the focus and the main participants of the street parties.²⁷ In others it is as if Gays give permission for others to partake in the behavior of reversal and reverie. Jack Kugelmass and a team of photographers went out on Halloween in Greenwich Village following participants in the street parade from the beginning, dressing up, to the end. Interviews with onlookers give the book an earthy, documentary feel that is rare in academic scholarship.²⁸ In

²⁷. Mary O'Drain, "San Francisco's Gay Halloween," International Folklore Review, 4(1986), pp. 90-95.

²⁸. Jack Kugelmass, et al., Masked Culture: the Greenwich Village Halloween Parade (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994) and the article by Kugelmass "Imagining Culture: New York City's Village Halloween Parade," pp. 141-157 in Ramón Gutiérrez and Genevève Fabre, eds. Feasts and Celebrations in North American Ethnic

Sydney, Australia, Mardi gras is seen as the Gay holiday, instead of Halloween, and has been noticed by scholars.²⁹

Another location of Gay folklore that is being explored is the Gay family. Gays have long used the word "family" and similar expressions of kinship to describe themselves. In the current culture wars the use of the term family becomes a powerful symbol for demonstrating the connection of Gays among themselves and to the rest of the "human family."³⁰ Family, then, is beginning to be defined by function rather than merely by "blood." (Blood, of course, resonates also as a term for a person who is seen as being close enough that he or she might be seen as biological family.) Ethnographers have attended to ways in which bonds are made in these small groups and have not neglected the role story telling has in

Communities (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1995).

²⁹. See Kym Seebohm, "The Nature and Meaning of the Sydney Mardi Gras in a Landscape of Inscribed Social Relations," pp. 193-222 and Peter McNeil, "The Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras Party: Masquerade and Muscle Culture," pp. 223-244 both in Robert Aldrich, ed., Gay Perspectives II: More Essays in Australian Gay Culture, Occasional Publications, Department of Economic History, University of Sydney, no. 5., (Sydney: Department of Economic History, University of Sydney, 1994). A photographic work about Sydney Mardi Gras, similar in spirit to Kugelmass, is Gerry North, The Night of Your Life: Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras (Sydney: Rural and City Media Services, 1992).

³⁰. A popular manifestation of this use is Nancy Armstrong, Family: a Portrait of Gay and Lesbian America (San Francisco: Harper, 1994).

the affectional process.³¹ In a 1989 panel at the American Folklore Society on family folklore, Joe Goodwin explored the folklore of his network which had invented its own nicknames, kinship terms and traditions.³² Perhaps the term family reflects the larger concerns of contemporary society because the men I interviewed certainly shared a lot of the artistic means of bonding that Weston and Goodwin describe but they did not think of the word family to organize their networks.

If the family has become a location of folklore research, generic interests also continue to be a priority. The "urban legend" or "contemporary legend" has become an industry among folklorists. Without getting into the debate about whether or not they form a legitimate "ethnic genre" or are merely a folklorist's "analytic category," clearly some have had Gay content. However, most of the urban legends with Gay content that have been explicated provide exoteric views of Gays. The most wide-spread legend concerns using gerbils or other rodents as stimulation of the anus resulting in visits to hospital emergency rooms. Often, these stories are attached to particular individuals in the

³¹. Kath Weston, Families We Choose: Lesbians, Gays, Kinship (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991).

³². Joseph P. Goodwin, "My First Ex-Lover-in-Law: You Can Choose Your Family," Southern Folklore 51(1994), pp. 35-47.

entertainment community.³³ Most commentators, rightly, I think, have seen the story as a confirming indicator of how homophobic our society is. Never mind the fact that this story has never been documented by any hospital, it is widely believed and is used as an example of how gross Gay sexual practices are. (The rectum, is also, of course, a sight of grossness for most Americans.) The story becomes a means of continuing to perceive Gays as other.

College age males are particularly vulnerable to being accused of being less than true men and since Gays are usually portrayed in our society as being only partly men, these students have considerable anxiety about being seen as "faggots" let alone engaging in homosexual activity, voluntarily or otherwise. Two legends indicate the fear of homosexual rape. One concerns a young man who is sedated by his Gay roommate then raped by him.³⁴ In another, a college student goes home with a woman who warns him in advance that her sexual interests are kinky. After he is naked and chained to her bed, she let loose from the closet an

³³. See Jan Harold Brunvand, The Mexican Pet: More "New" Urban Legends and Some Old Favorites (New York: Norton, 1986), pp. 78-79; Becky Vorpagel, "A Rodent By Any Other Name: Implications of a Contemporary Legend," International Folklore Review, 6(1988), pp. 53-57; Norine Dresser, "The Case of The Missing Gerbil," Western Folklore, 53(1994), pp. 229-242.

³⁴. Jan Harold Brunvand, The Baby Train and Other Lusty Urban Legends, (New York: Norton, 1993), pp. 308-311.

enormous black man who then rapes the helpless student.³⁵ It is not necessary to be a Dundesian interpreter of these stories to recognize the great anxiety homosexuals produce in many males.³⁶

Legend and belief have complex interrelations and there is no topic where the relationship between them and Gay people is the site of more important issues than AIDS. Folklorists concerned with how belief intersects with public policy, medical treatment and knowledge formation have begun to explore how Gay people have confronted the AIDS crisis. In some cases, the treatment of people with AIDS is informed by how the patient perceives the disease and the medical establishment. Jokes circulate, in all their forms, about people with AIDS indicating the fears and the anxieties the disease produces. Most importantly, when a folklorist looks at AIDS, it becomes possible to understand the role folklore plays in making responsible decisions about how to produce

³⁵. Stephen Winick, "Batman in the Closet: a New York Legend," Contemporary Legend, 2(1992), pp. 1-21.

³⁶. Dundes himself, of course, cannot resist applying his ideas on the psychoanalytic method to material that lends itself to homosexual interpretations. See for example "Into the Endzone for a Touchdown: a Psychoanalytic Consideration of American Football," Western Folklore, 37(1978), pp. 75-88 which itself produced considerable reaction in the American press. Also his "The Strategy of Turkish Boys' Verbal Dueling Rhymes," Journal of American Folklore, 83(1970), pp. 325-349 which he wrote with Jerry W. Leach and Bora Özkök, and "The American Game of 'Smear the Queer' and the Homosexual Component of Male Competitive Sport and Warfare," Journal of Psychoanalytic Anthropology, 8(1985), pp. 115-129.

realistic short-term relief for the disease and perhaps even long-term cures. As a practical matter, it is essential for clinicians to listen carefully to people with AIDS--a fact folklorists have been pointing out in similar contexts for a long time.³⁷

I recognize that AIDS is not, strictly speaking, a Gay disease but it is impossible to write about Gay folklore in the 1990's and not acknowledge the role it plays in the thinking of any Gay person. AIDS motivated me to begin this dissertation. I was and am convinced that the lost voices of my contemporaries, lost due to AIDS, are paralleled in the lost voices of the generation I chose to study. These older men, too, have recognized the parallel. AIDS, like it or not, inevitably became part of our conversations--often as a contrastive marker to the world they knew, or as a part of their lives today. AIDS also made me more vividly aware of the role expressive culture plays in political discourse through my own involvement in the movement to end the epidemic.³⁸ AIDS, then, becomes a unifying motivator for my

³⁷. These issues are addressed in the papers in Diane E. Goldstein, ed. Talking AIDS: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome, ISER Research and Policy Papers, no. 12, (St. John's, Newfoundland: Institute of Social and Economic Research, Memorial University, 1991). Also see Diane Goldstein, "Welcome to the Mainland, Welcome to the World of AIDS: Cultural Viability, Localization and Contemporary Legend," Contemporary Legend, 2(1992), pp. 23-40.

³⁸. Curiously, no folklorist has taken up the challenge of examining the aesthetics involved in the protest groups that have arisen around AIDS particularly when they are so

work, and the work of other folklorists who have worked with Gays, insofar as folklore always has a political dimension or consequence and a visible subtext in the lives of all Gay men whether or not they came out in the 1940's or the 1990's.

self-conscious in groups like ACT-UP and they bear a resemblance to other kinds of festival behavior. This aspect of ACT-UP is best realized in Douglas Crimp and Adam Rolston, AIDS demo graphics (Seattle: Bay Press, 1990).

CHAPTER 4: CIRCLING ROUND AND ROUND

Since, twenty years and more have circled round and round,
While he the globe was circling round and round,--and now
returns;

How changed the place--all the old land-marks gone.

--Walt Whitman, "Twenty Years," Leaves of Grass

Leave him alone for a moment or two,/ and you'll see him
with his head/ bent down, brooding, brooding,/ eyes fixed on
some chip,/ some stone, some common plant,/ the commonest
thing,/ as if it were the clue./ The disturbed eyes rise,/
furtive, foiled, dissatisfied/ from meditation on the true/
and insignificant.

--Robert Lowell, "Hawthorne," For the Union Dead

The notion of a hidden community permeates both the popular imagination and academic discourse. The idea that some groups remain obscured by others acknowledges the power dynamic that exists between groups and organizations as they compete for attention on the cultural stage. These power relationships can exist to oppress. These ideas also recognize that for various reasons people or groups may choose to remain hidden since it may be to their advantage to do so. It was clear to me that we knew very little about the day-to-day life of Gay men of the forties and fifties and about their strategies for socializing. Questions about the reality of their lives initially led me to formulate this project and write the list of questions I thought I might try to answer.

I started with general questions about the background of the person. When it was clear they were comfortable talking in the first person, I usually heard a "coming out story." From there I proceeded to more focused discussion

on topics relevant to the dissertation. The following questions were a rough guide:

What was your family's attitude toward Gay people?

How did you discover (find, locate) other Gay people?

Did you go to bars? How did you locate them?

If the answer is yes, then questions would follow:

How often did you go to these bars?

Were there bars that were Gay at specific times?

How did you determine someone was interested in you?

Were there any kind of group activities in the bars? (songs, shouts, etc.)

What happened at closing time?

Were there specific drinks especially associated with gay bars?

What kind of people came to these bars? (Age, sex, race, economic status, education, etc.)

Were you ever in a bar when it was raided? Do you know on what ground it was raided?

What kinds of social events did you attend with other Gay people:

Parties? Holidays? Halloween? Religious days?

If the person was emotionally attached to someone, it would be interesting to discover if there were particular folkloric aspects of that relationship.

Were their personal jokes? How was affection shown in public? Were there gift-giving customs?

What were the terms used to describe Gay people?

What were attitudes of Gay whites about race?

Did Gay blacks have different identification codes?

Were there special terms to describe inter-racial relationships?

How did ethnicity express itself? Were the ways in which other groups in the Gay community expressed themselves?

Did you know any anti-Gay epithets? Jokes?

How did anti-Gay defamation manifest itself?

How did people deal with violence?

How did you avoid being identified as being Gay if necessary?

Was there any particular kind of dress which was typical at home? Among friends? Socially? In bars?

Did men wear jewelry? What kinds? Earrings? Rings? Was jewelry used to indicate kinds of relationships?

What were the housing arrangements? Was subterfuge necessary?

How did you (and others) decorate your homes? Was there anything that identified it as Gay? What did it look like? Souvenirs?

How were relationships among related groups? Lesbians? Bisexuals? Friendly straights? Transvestites? Were there special terms for these groups? Where did sex take place? Homes? Hotels? Parks? Did religion have any role or impact in your life? In what way? What were relationships between age groups like? Was there differential status? Did people of different ages go to different places? What cultural events did you like? Music? Opera? Dance? Did you support the arts in any way? Poetry readings? Ballet? Did you notice Gay neighborhoods? How? What kinds of beliefs did you have about Gay people? What were the beliefs by others about Gay people? Were there any occupations that were identified as being Gay? What happened when a Gay friend died? Did you go to funerals? What were they like? Was there any special way of commemorating the person? Do you still see people from this period in you life? Do you talk about your past with them?

Obviously, I did not get definitive answers to all these questions, but I was surprised by how much congruity existed in the answers I did get from people who were total strangers to one another. In some instances, I got very brief answers to some questions; in other cases, people wanted to elaborate on one point.

Invariably, when I told people about my project and the men who helped me, I was asked "how did you find them?" Such a question acknowledges the almost gnostic knowledge that exists about and among older Gay men. This chapter describes the process by which I found them, how it fits in the tradition of folklore fieldwork, some of the problems I encountered, and, most importantly, the men I found. Therefore it will serve as the basis for the chapters that follow, particularly the next one, which describes how they

found other Gay people and made entry into Gay life using aesthetic means. A very important consideration to be remembered is that this chapter is, of necessity, the most personal one since my responsibility for this process is more direct here than in any other part of this enterprise.¹ After all, I am the one who chose to interview this person and not that one; to ask this question and not another.

I knew there were Gay men who recalled the way Gay life was in the 1940's and 50's. I knew it because I am Gay myself and although I cannot say that I was close to anyone who fit that description, I had seen them, I knew people who did know them and I knew that there were certain bars that attracted men of that age group. But I also knew that not everyone who was Gay today would have been out in the life then, so age could not be the only determining factor for a person to provide relevant information. I had also read some of the classic Gay novels of the era and assumed that though the accounts were fictional, they had to have some basis in reality.

Another factor contributing to my interest and comfort with the topic was that, by and large, I liked older people.

¹. Today, the ethnographic enterprise is more self-conscious than it has been in the past. Historically, ethnography attempted a "scientific" foundation--a methodology that aimed at "objectivity." I think the present conception of it which includes reflexivity is more realistic. See for example the essays in Writing Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography, James Clifford and George E. Marcus, eds. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986).

I had experience working with them over eight summers in a hotel on the coast of New Jersey in a small town that was appealing to older people and catered to them. Some of the guests, I realized later, must have been Gay, particularly the one who referred to me as "that handsome bitch." Also, two of the men I worked for in my library career were members of the population that interested me and were now retired. I had affectionate relationships with both of them and although I did not interview them with tape recorder in hand, they provided important data which early on suggested the parameters the project might take. So, by experience and temperament, I enjoyed their company.

As I began formulating the project I began to ask people I knew, mostly middle-aged Gays, whether or not it seemed feasible. Some of them, those approaching sixty, had been out in the life, one way or another, during the fifties so they were able to make some suggestions about the quality of life then and confirmed the project's potential. They were also in a position to know people who were older than they were, who would have been young adults during the period that interested me. I made most of my early contacts through them.² Once I had met one person, I was surprised

². Honesty compels me to admit that I knew several of these original men through my participation in a particular twelve-step program. Participation in it requires a commitment to anonymity so that certain details, of necessity, must be undocumented. I will address other issues of anonymity a bit later.

how forthcoming they were to suggest others who might be interested in talking about their experiences. Not one person I called turned me down. To be sure I was able to identify myself as having already interviewed someone they knew but I was gratified they were so willing to talk to me since I expected to find suspicion about someone who was really a complete stranger. In some instances the friends were quite close, in some cases friends of many years, to the people who were my friends so it was easier for them to trust me, I think.

Because I work full time, the interviewing took place irregularly over several years. It began in July 1992 during an two month vacation in San Francisco. I had several friends there, as would most Gay men my age, since it remains the most Gay friendly city in the country. Through two of them I met my first two contacts. In one instance, a friend who was middle-aged gave me the number of an older friend of his that he had known as a young man in New York. The other was the mate of a friend of one of my friends. Ken who was a peer of mine, had a friend, also close to me in age whose lover was in his upper sixties, some thirty-five years older.³ Through him I also met two other men in San

³. Ken died of AIDS on January 2, 1995. His enthusiasm and support for my project provided me with the first interview I did. He was not sure if this man would be interested in being interviewed so he had one of his wonderful large dinner parties and invited us. I hit it off with him and thanks to Ken overcame my fearful inertia to get started. I will never not miss him. I must also say

Francisco to interview who were lovers of over twenty years. One of them actually lived in Philadelphia and since he was an academic was able to be in San Francisco every summer.

In Philadelphia, my home, the process was extended over a longer period of time due the constraints imposed by working life. Nevertheless, the same strategy applied. Through people I knew I was given names of people who met the criteria. Although it may appear that young people predominate in Gay life because they do so in its most visible forms, the bars and street life, I found that socially it is fairly well-integrated generationally. So it was possible for people I knew who were my age to suggest names of people to call.

In three instances the men were friends or teachers of my friends: one was someone who looked after a friend's antique shop, another was a friend's voice teacher, and another was connected to a friend through the twelve-step process. In the last case, I interviewed the man twice: once by himself, and then he suggested I interview him again with a long-time friend of his. They had met in the fifties in the men's room at 30th Street Station, Philadelphia and had remained friends ever since. I also interviewed a couple of pairs of long-term lovers together. These interviews were different from the others in that they tended not only to address the folklore issues that interested me but also to

Ken's Rose Kennedy drag was inspired.

incorporate the history of the relationship.

Other people were introduced to me by folklore colleagues, both Gay and straight. One fellow student knew a man who was still an active bartender in a Gay bar in Philadelphia. My advisor had neighbors who were Gay and they supplied me with a list of names. This was so large that I probably will not reach every person on it until after the dissertation is finished. Another faculty member had a Gay roommate in college. I had actually met this person because he was friends with someone I knew who was closer to my age. This coincidence is indicative of how intimate the Gay community in Philadelphia can be.

Clearly, then, there was no dearth of people to interview. I do not think of myself as being especially well-connected in the community but I found over twenty-five people to interview quite easily. My original intention was to find about that number but what I discovered, to my surprise, was that there was so much congruence in the content of the interviews that perhaps fewer would be necessary. By the time I had twenty hours of interviewing done, I realized I had enough material, and a strong sense of what its parameters were, to complete the dissertation. To some extent, I pressed on to do other interviews because I liked doing them (meeting and talking with people, after all, is the primary pleasure in folklore research) and whenever my energy for the project wavered, I found that

interviewing people re-energized me.⁴

A typical interview took place in the person's home. Before I began the interview, I explained to them what the purpose of the interview was and ask them to sign a release form. The form allowed them to let me use their name, or not, in my work depending on what their preference was in this regard. My initial suspicion that very few of them would give me this permission was confirmed. I also felt strongly that the people interviewed should have as much control of the situation as they could since they were giving so much of themselves. The interviews usually lasted about two hours. In most instances they were tape-recorded. My hosts commonly were concerned about my comfort and offered some tea or coffee, so the atmosphere was low key and even friendly and conversational. I had begun the assumption that the interviews would be more like census interviews in their style and structure but found rapidly that the more open they were, the more likely I was to get the kind of material I sought with a concomitant ease of story telling emerging. Certainly, the preference of the men.

⁴. One important issue in folklore fieldwork that concerned me was the issue of quantity. Henry Glassie put it this way, "Record a few isolated stories, and you will find them too easy to interpret; they will lead you anywhere or nowhere, and usually lead you back to your own scholastic preoccupations. But entire repertoires are too sturdy to maul, so complex that their elements interlock, containing and directing quests for meaning," Passing the Time in Ballymenone (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982), p. 731.

was to make them informal. I found that when I stuck rigidly to the questionnaire approach, the responses were commonly "I don't remember" or "I don't know." Occasionally, I would have to be more focused, but even when there were digressions they were invariably interesting and contributed to a better understanding of the person.

Goldstein characterizes the field work process along two parameters--interviewing and observing.⁵ As I indicated in the first chapter, observation was out of the question since the phenomena that interested me took place over thirty-five years ago. I then needed a methodology that was congruent with my subject and had a record of success in the field. The life history approach seemed the most productive because I knew that I was not going to be able to approach a natural context. The benefit of life history is that it does give a sense of how the person fits in a larger social context and thus gives the interviewer a means of getting at how folklore was performed in context.

Another element of this work might be questioned is the extent to which it constitutes field work at all. The classic, if stereotypic, image of folklore field work usually consists of two parts. The folklorist is an educated, perhaps dilettantish, man (almost always) visibly in rapture over recording that last performance of, say, an

⁵. Kenneth S. Goldstein, A Guide for Field Workers in Folklore (Hatboro, PA: Folklore Associates, 1964), p. 77.

ancient ballad. The second part, the person singing that ballad, is a crusty and colorful, old man or women in a rural setting grateful for the attention, or adoration. One variation on this image involves foreign travel but the underlying construction is the same--the folklorist remains a romantic gatherer of cultural artifacts from a romanticized other.

My work did not come close to that image. It was me and one older Gay man talking for a couple of hours usually in comfortable, sometimes actually quite grand, surroundings with a tape recorder that periodically needed checking. The extent to which performance occurred, in the sense that Dell Hymes intended, was rare and could be seen only in personal experience anecdotes, sometimes told very well.⁶ Mostly, the interviews had the character of brain-picking sessions. I would ask a question about some small aspect of the life and the response would be brief but informative or not an active part of the person's memory. In some instances, the questions would trigger some memory that could be read in phenomenological terms as a breakthrough. When this happened the character of the conversation changed and the interview became more relaxed. It was only in these situations that

⁶. Hymes' idea of "breakthrough into performance" was very helpful to me for reasons I will elaborate. See his essay of that title, pp. 79-141 and related essays in his "In vain I Tried to tell you." Essays in Native American Ethnopoetics (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981).

the performative aspect of folklore was foregrounded; the rest was mere recollection. All of the material might be folklore, or recollection of folklore, in the aesthetic sense folklorists seek, but the enjoyment came at those moments when these men were obviously delighted to be connecting with their pasts not merely relating bits of it. It was at those moments that it was possible to realize the idea of breakthrough that Hymes describes so well.

Yet, if one so chooses what I did can be reduced to the romantic idea I introduced. I did go to work with the idea that although I was not going to be going to rural Utah to collect folksongs or to Aborigines in Australia to witness epic story telling, I was indeed trying to visit a foreign country--one removed enough from my experience that it would have some element of the exotic. The idea of the field as a different world, in this instance, might be seen as a matter of degree.⁷ The memories of these men was the field, and the way to it was to find ways to let us access it together.

These then are the problems a reasonable folklorist might raise about what occurred: to what extent was this

⁷. It is too simple to rely on metaphors for historical field work as "lost worlds" or "foreign countries" though most of us are at a loss for other words. Two influential books in the metaphoric endeavor are Peter Laslett, The World We Have Lost: England Before the Industrial Age, Third edition (New York: Scribner's, 1984) and David Lowenthal, The Past is a Foreign Country (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985). For a survey of the many problems inherent in ethnographic method see Martyn Hammersley, What's Wrong With Ethnography? (London: Routledge, 1992).

really "the field?"; in what usual sense is what I found generically related to folklore?; what exactly was performed? I did not go far away. In one interview, I went two blocks from where I live. But I did find men whose experiences were different enough from my own that I found it necessary to calibrate their lives with my own, in order to gain real understanding. Perhaps "the field experience" is always a matter of such calibration. There may not be generic names, emic or etic, for most of what is on my tapes. Nevertheless, there is an artful quality to much of the discourse both in the way it was related, and in the actual original experiences.

To a great degree, however, the question of "the field" and its location is the wrong one. In a very real way, every other human being is "other." The whole experience of getting to know even those we are closest to is a kind of exploration. In the final analysis, then, what I encountered was the unknown.

Another similar objection to my place of "field" might be that I am too close to these men being Gay myself so it is possible to point out that I did not have the necessary distance from them to be analytically effective. My response here is that the world they reported is different enough from the one I have experienced to be a different country and that the fact that we shared being Gay in common may well be a strength. As Richard Bauman says, "trained folklorists

who are themselves members of the groups whose folklore they study, can perform a valuable service by elucidating the cultural meanings of materials gathered from those groups."⁸ I would like to think that there was enough difference and enough sameness between us to have the best pivot possible for insight.

And there are others in the folklore tradition whose work has been similar. Henry Glassie relied on the memories of people mumming, not on his own experience of watching people do it. When Philip Kahclamet speaks in Wishram to Dell Hymes he was performing (I would not say demonstrating), even if briefly, an inactive art. Don Yoder's Pennsylvania spirituals were performed for him, not for the original intended audience. Yet Glassie saw the art of Hugh Nolan and Peter Flanagan, Hymes saw true performance, in some sense, and Yoder documented the memories of culture.⁹ To be sure, in no instance was the material I recorded as aesthetically pleasing as that of these three but the underlying experience for the folklorist

⁸. Richard Bauman, "The Field Study of Folklore in Context," in Handbook of American Folklore, ed. by Richard M. Dorson (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983), p. 363.

⁹. I choose these three because they are among my favorites. A dozen others could be chosen. See Henry Glassie, All Silver and No Brass: an Irish Christmas Mumming (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1975), Hymes, "Breakthrough into Performance," and Don Yoder, Pennsylvania Spirituals (Lancaster, PA: Pennsylvania Folklife Society, 1961).

was the same.

The other major issue in this process that needs to be addressed is methodological. My initial impetus was to use life history techniques to get at folkloric memories. Consequently, the questions I outlined were based on ideas as I outlined in chapter one. In reality, the life history approach was not completely necessary. That is to say, a full life history was not recorded. Rather, what happened might be called a "life review."¹⁰ In actual practice, I found that by asking a few pointed questions I was able to trigger appropriate memories.

Encountering others in field work always leads to unexpected results and difficulties. If my agenda was to have certain questions answered in a checklist-like fashion, it was not the agenda of the men I interviewed. Though they would often ask me what it was I wanted to know, they did not always have the ability to recall the answers. For example, though every one of them had been inside Gay bars during the period, few were able to recall exactly what they looked like, what people wore and the other little details that interested me. Some reasons for this gap in their memories include the fact that as older people their memories were not as good as they once were, the events

¹⁰. Patrick B. Mullen, Listening to Old Voices: Folklore, Life Stories and the Elderly (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992), p. 15.

themselves were long ago, they themselves were not as concerned as I was about such things (they are not ethnographically conscious the way a folklorist might be) and in the context of this particular question, if they were drinking in a bar, alcohol automatically impairs memory. Here is yet another example of why it was necessary for me to find enough people to interview to gain enough data to discover congruities in experience.

The age of the men was rarely a serious problem, though, as indicated, their memories of particular events varied considerably or they found it difficult to pinpoint exactly when certain events in their lives took place. Others have noted the characteristics of interviewing older people. In many instances, the enthusiasm for being interviewed flagged a bit when the interview takes place. They simply tire more easily. For that reason, it was a good idea, I realized in retrospect, to keep the interview sessions at about two hours. It was still impressive how helpful they wanted to be. This desire, born of age, was also manifest in the fact that as Gay men, they felt their histories were ignored and needed to be documented.

The sexual dimension of field work has only recently become subject to analysis.¹¹ Undoubtedly, it has been part

¹¹. Esther Newton, "My Best Informant's Dress: the Erotic Equation in Fieldwork," Cultural Anthropology, 8(1993), pp. 3-23; Frank Proschan, "How is a Folklorist like a Riddle?," Southern Folklore, 47(1990), pp. 57-75. Proschan's article

of the process all along, but it is only now that we are able to be frank about it. Sexual tension exists between all people by virtue of our being animals, I think. When sexual identities are foregrounded as they are in contexts where one's sexuality is the subject of conversation, it is impossible for there not to be some element of live sexuality in the air. It certainly was an issue in my interviews. In a few cases the people I interviewed wanted to know my sexual history and did not automatically assume I was Gay. The motives for my research were also, at least once, thought to be explicitly sexual. One man thought I was doing this work so I could meet older men as sexual partners. I was unnerved by his comment but assured him that was not a motive. Another, with raised eyebrow, asked what I was into sexually. It seemed only fair to answer the question since he had answered so many of mine but I was quite uncomfortable doing so. More often than not, though, the sexual tension was dealt with in humor by kidding one another about sexual exploits. I would try to make the

is from a special issue of Southern Folklore titled "Folklore Fieldwork: Sex, Sexuality, and Gender." For another reflexive comment on this issue see Walter L. Williams, "Being Gay and Doing Research on Homosexuality in Non-Western Cultures," Journal of Sex Research, 30(1993), pp. 115-120. Other relevant articles are Carol A. B. Warren, "Fieldwork in the Gay World: Issues in Phenomenological Research," Journal of Social Research, 33(1977), pp. 93-106, Warren's Gender Issues in Fieldwork, Qualitative Research Series, no. 9, (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1988) and Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo's review article of several books, "Gender and Fieldwork," Women's Studies International Forum, 11(1988), pp. 611-618.

questions as neutral as possible but on occasion I could not help but admit my admiration for the skill of some of their sexual encounters. If my overt sexuality came to the fore in any circumstance, it was undoubtedly in gathering this sort of information since my skills here are lacking.

The other location of analysis that needs to be foregrounded in the interviewing process is economic class. Like sexuality, class is a topic that is awkward to talk about in our culture but if the situation of my relations with the men I interviewed is to be understood and placed, this topic must be addressed.¹² Class and sexuality are inextricably intertwined. Indeed, as Foucault suggests, sexuality itself is a bourgeois invention.¹³ The ability to have a "Gay life" or to define oneself as being Gay necessitates an economic ability to participate in a life style which foregrounds sexuality to the near exclusion of other defining factors in identity. Thus, for someone to suggest that their sexuality is a more elemental part of their identity than any other, positions them automatically in a privileged location.¹⁴ I would argue that this positioning takes place even as men perform their Gayness

¹². Benjamin DeMott, The Imperial Middle: Why Americans Can't Think Straight About Class (New York: Morrow, 1990).

¹³. Michel Foucault, The History of Sexuality: an Introduction (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), p. 127.

¹⁴. John Champagne, "Seven Speculations on Queers and Class," Journal of Homosexuality, 26(1993), p. 160.

even if their origins were not privileged. That is not to say that class differences cannot be examined among Gays, but that Gayness is inherently bourgeois since participation in it requires that other economic factors in identity be accounted for first. So that even when men who are born poor "come out," they are coming out as more than just Gay. They are also taking on tastes that use the middle-class as a foil for comparison. Or more accurately, the image of what it means to be Gay in the popular imagination is closely tied to material possessions which suggest an income that is able to afford a particular kind of life. It can be manifest in many ways. Two contrasting examples, if stereotypes, from today's Gay world suffice: 1) the man who holds a professional position and is able to afford expensive leisure clothing and holidays and 2) his less well-employed counterpart who might work as a waiter but still has enough discretionary income to afford the accoutrements of his circle--Doc Martins, leather jackets, etc. Both examples certainly exist and necessitate incomes beyond those of the working class or if not real incomes, discretionary ones that do not have to account for more than one person.

All of the Gay men I interviewed were steadily employed through the 40's and 50's. Some were in white collar careers, others were in the service sector or blue collar work. At one extreme, a particular man came from a wealthy family and never really had to work; at the other, was a man

who worked as a bar tender, or, as he was able, did seasonal work. A few were in the military either because of the draft or as a choice for economic reasons. Even the poorest of them was in a position to see a good deal of the United States, if not the world, attend a variety of cultural events and have some possessions that would be out of reach for the working class of say, Kensington, Philadelphia, Green Point, Brooklyn or a farming town in Iowa. All of them left behind their origins in a way that most of their siblings did not. And, if their roots were not already middle class, in leaving the origins behind they took on other values--ones that were more distinctly middle class: interests in the arts, education, intellectual pursuits.

Class must also be analyzed in a reflexive way. It may well be that anthropology (or in this case field work) is, to use Clyde Kluckhohn's famous aphorism, nothing more than an intellectual poaching license. Consequently, honesty requires that the observer be situated in the class system, so it might be made clearer who is doing the poaching. I poached from people who were not really all that different from me in the American class system. Like most Americans I would claim to be middle-class though reality would put my family of origin on the lower end of it. Three of my grandparents were immigrants, my maternal grandmother the exception. My father was a teacher and musician, and my mother was in health care administration. They were better

educated than most of their generation--I am casually proud that all three of us hold Columbia University master's degrees, if in wildly different subjects. On the other hand, neither my mother or father would have fit in at a wine and cheese reception in an elite university. And for that matter, I do not feel like I can be myself in such settings.

When encountering these men I brought my own class consciousness into the process. Since most of them were recognizably similar to me in this regard, this consciousness was not a cause of friction. The most accessible barometer of class was the address at which someone lived and the material belongings chosen by or available to the individual depending on their income. On a couple of occasions I was a bit baffled in my attempt to make sense of the way in which an apartment or house was decorated. One apartment in Philadelphia was crammed with what seemed to me to be overdone gold lamps, religious objects and collectibles that were almost a parody of good taste or conspicuous consumption. I could not help but bring my own sensibilities into this situation and since the decorating style was clearly making a personal statement of the person's tastes, respond to it. In fact, it was so bold, I believe all observers were intended to respond in some way. In another, more low key case, a man who had lived most of his life in a hand-to-mouth existence had a very simple studio apartment in public housing. Nevertheless, he was

proud of the fact that he was well-read and artistically sophisticated--a fact that was supported by lots of worn books, and posters and original art work on the walls. He was the only person I interviewed to overtly comment on class structure in the Gay world. His most trenchant insight described men who pretend to be "Mainline" and yet are ribbon clerks in department stores.¹⁵

A few men were more directly involved in the arts which was documented on their hallway walls with, in two cases, dozens of photographs of celebrities, many signed. It would be an interesting investigation in material culture to know to what extent each persona was invested in creating their surroundings. Clearly, though, each was making a statement and symbolically, if not directly placing himself on the class ladder.

Just as class and sexuality played a thematic role in doing field work with all these men, so did the closet which is the intersection of the two. The term "coming out" was used to mean participating in Gay life, the Gay life (emphasis theirs) or simply, the life, to most of them. It had little to do with telling other people that they were

¹⁵. Were ribbon clerks mostly Gay? One of the men interviewed by Keith Vacha in Quiet Fire: Memoirs of Older Gay Men (Trumansburg, NY: Crossing Press, 1985) makes virtually the same comment in his typology of Gay men: "Then there were the 'belles,' the piss-elegant queens. They were the ribbon clerks who would work all day at Woolworth's and go out that evening and have several nickel beers." (p. 174).

Gay. Most of them said they were unwilling to let me use their names in the dissertation. Most of them expressed real concern over giving out any details that might betray their personal identity in my written work. In fact, only one was willing to let me use his name. One man would not give me permission to tape him though he was actually quite animated in conversation and many people knew he was Gay. Geography seemed not to be a factor in this common characteristic. Whether or not they had led Gay lives in the relative safety of San Francisco, or the anonymity of New York several people in the course of the interviews would ask questions such as "you're not going to mention that?" (referring to some identifying detail) or "this is just between you and me, right?" The obvious consequence of their concerns is that I will not be using their names or other specifying details later in this chapter when I describe them.

To most of them, to be in the closet meant to be homosexual and not to participate in Gay life, or to only do so for sexual release and not for sociability. The closet was, therefore, more narrowly defined to them than it would be today by Gays. It is also a term that has wider applicability today thanks to these men. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick argues that the closet may well be the primary metaphor of our century incorporating as it does the dualities of "secrecy/disclosure and private/public." Contrasting the closet with coming out she sees this

opposition as being essential to understanding most of the other operative dichotomies of our time.¹⁶

The closet as a location to position oneself vis à vis the larger culture looms large in the social construction of society as these men built it. And to be sure, the closet, as WE conceive it today, was a necessity for most of them to survive in an oppressive environment whose lessons they have not forgotten and continue to play out, even if the cultural circumstances have significantly changed since the earlier era. For them, coming out had more to do with the old fashioned debutante sense of the expression, than in our conception of it being a more overt political act.

Other factors that might lead to prosopography are minimal. As I indicated, this was (and, for those who are financially and physically able, are) a geographically mobile group of men. All of the Philadelphians I interviewed were born in the city or around it as were most of the New Yorkers. In San Francisco, the situation was different. All of them came from elsewhere, some came to "the city" forty-five years ago. None of the San Franciscans were recent migrants to this Gay mecca. They all had good health. None seemed overwhelmed by a few hours of interviewing although a

¹⁶. Epistemology of the Closet (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), especially pp. 71-75. It is unfortunate that Goffman did not bring his conceptualization of stigma, except obliquely, to bear on the idea of the closet. For "the closet" is a technique of managing identity for Gays who are, in the larger society, normal/different.

couple were tired by the end. A few smoked and drank, some never did; others gave up one or the other. Two chain-smoked during the interviews. All were astonishingly articulate, it seemed to me, indicating that they had given a lot of thought to the content of their lives. Even when their memories failed when answering specific questions, it was clear they had thought about them. In any case, if they were unable to provide specifics on one question, they were clear on others. I do not think their responses were for my benefit, either. Their answers were too spontaneous, their affects too helpful, to have been attempts to deceive.

One major failing in the process is the lack of a substantial racial mix. I only interviewed one African American. Certainly, I always asked about race relations among Gays during the fifties but this gap is one that needs to be addressed because it is certain that there was a substantial culture existing among Gay blacks during this era. Just as with class, then, I found people who were, more or less, like myself. I think in most cases field work leads to such immediate connections first even when it takes place far from home. Surely, even Malinowski began with connecting to Trobriand Islanders with whom he shared some common element. Nevertheless, I believe this is a serious gap in the field work. During this era, otherness existed on both sides of the racial divide in this country and we need to know more about how it was manifest and mediated among Gays.

If they shared some things in common, it must not be forgotten that they were each flesh and blood individuals with a unique array of characteristics. The ethnological problem I face is how to realize their individuality without betraying their confidence. Since life histories are my source, the expectation is that factual truth will be the basis of my descriptions. Yet my commitment to them was that, if they chose, I would not describe them in any way that would betray who they were specifically. Academic standards require that there be a strong element of verifiability to what I have done. Like Forster, I admit, I would rather betray my discipline than my friends, so if I err on the side of keeping the secrets of my friends, so be it. The best, then, I can hope to reveal is description approaching reality with no illusions about providing enough data to allow someone else to retrace my steps. Fortunately, no ethnography is absolutely true and written without an interpretive frame, and I can cite many ethnographic precedents that have faced the same conundrum I have.¹⁷

¹⁷. On the first point see James Clifford and George E. Marcus, eds. Writing Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986). Several of the essays deal with the issue of authority in ethnography, and that issue is at the heart of my conundrum. To what extent is my account authoritative? One famous ethnography I admire which keeps its subjects obscure, if not completely anonymous is: William Foote Whyte, Street Corner Society: the Social Structure of an Italian Slum, enlarged edition, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955) and . A more recent example from my own department is Edmund B. O'Reilly, "Toward Rhetorical Immunity: Narratives of Alcoholism and Recovery," Diss.

What I hope to do, then, is briefly describe the men I interviewed in deep enough terms to give them bodies but not so completely as to allow anyone to locate them. I will provide these sketches roughly in the order I interviewed them and also describe the surroundings in which the interviews took place. When names are used, they are used for convenience and stylistic sake, not for purposes of identification, and bear little resemblance to a man's given name. I am glad to acknowledge them, off the necessary, generic pages of dissertation acknowledgements, because, lets face it, they are more important than mere intellectual descent.¹⁸

The first interview I did was with a man in his early seventies who had spent most of his adult life in San Francisco. Born in a farming community in the Midwest, Hal left, as many of his generation did, to serve in the army in World War II. He used the GI bill to earn degrees in journalism from elite universities. Most of his early career

University of Pennsylvania, 1988. Another axis of analysis, it seems to me, that is often overlooked is that of trust: trust in the ethnographer by the reader, trust in the subjects by the ethnographer. Perhaps it is really trust between, rather than trust in the various human contact points. Also, the question might be to what extent does trust supersede authenticity as the goal?

¹⁸. Eyal Ben-Ari, "On Acknowledgements in Ethnographies," pp. 130-164 in John Van Maanen, ed., Representation in Ethnography (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1995) is mostly concerned with intellectual acknowledgement but does discuss other issues in the genre.

was spent working for technical trade magazines. After several years in New York, he moved to San Francisco in the early 1950's and though semi-retired he continues to work as a consultant to a prominent food critic. He had come out in Gay life in New York, though he had several furtive liaisons as a teenager and in the military. Realizing that San Francisco might be more congenial, he decided to move there. Hal's lover, who is substantially younger, was friends of one of my closest friends. We met at a dinner party that was set up by our mutual friend, ostensibly to see if we would get along well enough to do an interview. Though it was a bit awkward at first, we set up an appointment and he was more than forthcoming about his life, even if he was very concerned that his anonymity be protected. Several times during the interview he would indicate that he did not want even the slightest detail revealed that might suggest who he was. The interview took place in the apartment he shared with his lover overlooking San Francisco's Twin Peaks. Not surprisingly, given the turn his career has taken at this stage of life, he was a generous host and had furnished his surroundings in modest but good taste. It was clear by the end of the interview that there was a bond of affection between us.

The same cannot be said about the second interviewee. I met him through the retired journalist. They had been friends for more than twenty years. There were four of us

for lunch at an expensive restaurant in Pacific Heights--me, the journalist, Greg and his lover, who came to San Francisco every summer for more than fifteen years, from Philadelphia, where he was a university professor.

(Surprisingly, I did not know him--it is surprising only because the Gay community in Philadelphia is small really, and the number of Gay people with academic connections there even smaller. I latter found out that several people I knew did know him though.) After lunch we went back to Greg's house, an example of one of San Francisco's great Victorian domestic masterpieces near Alamo Square. Greg had come from a wealthy Argentine family with connections to the United States and had been sent to military boarding school here. He remained in the United States after school, attending a large state university in the southwest. It was there that Greg discovered gay life though he had sexual experiences with men as a younger man in Argentina. By the mid-fifties he regularly found his way to Griffith Park in Los Angeles which was a well-known cruising ground. After college, he married, and moved into the business world in New York. Though he had male lovers during the marriage, this aspect of his life remained separate and unknown to his wife and family back in Argentina as they do to this day. He divorced by the early 1960's and moved to San Francisco where he has remained since and since he is independently wealthy through inheritance, he has never had to work. His house is

indicative of his wealth--lavishly furnished with antiques, middle eastern carpets, large house plants and every detail flawless. The interview itself was tense. It seemed to me at the time, he was doing it as a lark, unlike Hal (and the others I interviewed later) who genuinely seemed to want to help. It was an experience which felt like I was trying to pry information out of him. Nevertheless, when I have listened to the tapes later, I found them quite informative even if the process seemed strained at times.

David McKay, too, had come to San Francisco in the pre-Stonewall era. He was a long time friend of a friend of mine who lived in San Francisco. They had known one another in New York in the early 50's having met in a bar in the "bird circuit."¹⁹ Though they had never become lovers they remained in contact on and off in the intervening forty years. Born into a poor family, he suffered from parental neglect. As a young man, he lived with various relatives in the American and Canadian northwest until he moved to the YMCA in Seattle. He joined the Air Force when he was 18. It was necessary for him to be clever about hiding the fact the he was Gay during those years though he was actually active in Gay life then and lived off-base with a pair of lovers for much of the time he was stationed in San Antonio. Later he was sent to a base outside of Las Vegas. After the military, in 1951, he moved to Corpus Christi and lived

¹⁹. More about the bird circuit later.

again with these lovers. By the end of his term in the military, he was not certain what direction his life would take. He attended the University of Washington. He met someone from San Francisco in a bar in Seattle who suggested he move and found him some job opportunities. His first job in San Francisco was as an assistant with an interior decorator. He lost that job and moved to Fresno for a job in a department store. After an intense affair with a man there failed, he met a woman and married her. In their first few years of marriage, they lived throughout the Pacific west settling once again in San Francisco. David continued to have Gay sex but would not get "emotionally involved." Amazingly, they had a circle of friends who were married Gay men and their wives. The men, evidently, had no secrets, but David did not think the women knew about the other parts of their husbands' lives. His career in interior decorating was successful for many years but then ran out of steam. Later in the 50's he divorced amicably and moved to the apartment where he still lives. This apartment building on Russian Hill was, and still is, inhabited mostly by Gay men, many having lived there for 40 years. As a potential resource of the history of Gay lives, this building seems to me extraordinary. Here is one set of Gay men whose lives have intertwined over a long period of time, with continuity and yet each of the fifteen households provides discrete and separate lenses into Gay life.

Today, McKay works as a desk clerk in a San Francisco gentleman's club. He wears a wedding ring because he believes it is better to appear to be straight. Our interview took place in his modest, but tastefully decorated, apartment on Russian Hill on a bright summer afternoon in San Francisco, the breeze from the bay blowing through the curtains. We ended up talking for several hours after the tape ran out, largely, I think, because we enjoyed each other's company and shared a sense of humor. If my interview with him had a failing it was that I liked listening to him tell stories so much that I neglected to ask him some of the questions that I intended. He had several errands to run and I went along with him later and he also gave me a tour of the hot spots of Gay San Francisco in the fifties. Through our mutual friend, I have kept in touch with him. When I have been in San Francisco on subsequent visits, I find I still enjoy his company.

The common reaction to the subject of this dissertation has been, as I indicated, "where did you find them?" In some cases I only had to go a few blocks from my home in West Philadelphia--not particularly known for being a Gay neighborhood. Retired now, Stephen Lyman had been a long-time employee in one of the area's large universities and had a distinguished career there. Many people knew him including, I later realized, some of my friends and acquaintances. Several people I knew had spoken of him so I

had a vague sense of who he was even before interviewing him. When I contacted him he was glad to be interviewed, enthusiastic almost, which was characteristic of his extroverted personality.

Lyman was born in the distant Philadelphia suburbs and spent his early life there and other Philadelphia blue collar suburbs. Like many of his generation he served in the military. In his case he was sent to Europe in the Navy. When he was 22 he married while on leave. It was fairly early on during the marriage that he came to terms with being Gay after a brief affair in Boston. Indicative of his ability to make friends and keep them is the fact that Stephen is still in touch with the man nearly fifty years later. The Boston episode made clear what he had suspected for years so he told his wife what the situation was and divorced. After the war, he earned his doctorate in education from the university that became his employer for the next thirty years.

During the fifties he held positions of increasing responsibility at the university in recruiting and development. These jobs often took him on the road giving him the opportunity to hone his skills at meeting men. At home, his social life was full. Parties were the norm most weeks and visits to Philadelphia's Gay bars were not unusual. He lived with a friend, Robert, from the mid-fifties onward until the friend died in the mid-1980s. This

was a completely non-sexual relationship. Lyman thinks this person was, in fact, either asexual or repressed his homosexual feelings to the point of being asexual. He inherited the house and now rents out several rooms in it giving it a sort of boarding house feeling. Today, his life is quite comfortable. He gives a lot of his time to volunteer work and is able to spend much time travelling which he loves.

My interview with him took place on a bright late winter afternoon in his living room there. Furnished with antiques, it almost has a cluttered feeling. Stephen indicated that Robert had let a lot of the upkeep on the place fall by the wayside so the house does not look much like it did before he died. During the interview he had the local classical music station playing on the radio. There were several interruptions with various people coming and going. Since we share several friends in common, I still see him quite frequently and I think we became closer because of the interviews.

The one African American I interviewed I met through Stephen. They are the pair that met in a men's room in one of Philadelphia's train stations that I alluded to earlier. LeGrand Richards was born in Philadelphia in 1938 and began to deal with being Gay quite young. By the time he was 12 he knew he was Gay and began to act on it, meeting men in movie theaters and on the street. He went into the army in 1956,

and served in Europe where he went to Gay bars for the first time. He had little interaction with white people until he went into the military. In most Gay bars in the United States, Black people were not welcome. As a result, separate Black Gay establishments came into being. LeGrand found few of them in Philadelphia, so he often went to New York for the weekend, staying with relatives.²⁰ There were several Gay bars in Harlem that catered to African Americans, though many white people went to them as well. The segregation of Gay bars went on through the sixties in Philadelphia although some places would let Blacks in, if they were "dressed properly" and accompanied by a white person.

Many of the people he met during this era have remained his friends. Because he traveled a lot in the military, these friends are all over the world. Richards had several lovers but his current relationship has lasted thirty years, though they have never lived together.

Stephen introduced me to LeGrand and stayed through the interview. It was interesting to have the two of them together during the interview as they triggered each other's memories and gossiped about people they knew. LeGrand served food and coffee and more than most of the interviews I did, this one seemed more like friends getting together and

²⁰. See Eric Garber, "A Spectacle in Color: Lesbian and Gay Subculture of Jazz Age Harlem," pp. 318-331 in Martin Duberman, Martha Vicinus and George Chauncey, Jr., eds., Hidden From History: Reclaiming the Gay and Lesbian Past (New York: New American Library, 1989).

talking. We often strayed "off topic." His apartment in West Philadelphia was in a building he owned and he prided himself on its fine furnishings and paintings, much of which was bought at some of the famous auction houses in New York. One slight annoyance in this case was the sound of the trolleys clanking by which sometimes makes understanding the tape difficult.

Another pair I interviewed together were lovers. Robert Brigham and Joseph Fielding met in college in the late forties. They took French together and became friends, often riding home together since they lived with their families near one another. It took a while for them to realize the strong feelings they had for each other and they think their relationship is stronger as a result. They see themselves as having been friends first sharing common interests, then lovers, and that sequence, they believe, has been beneficial for the relationship. After living separately for several years, they moved in together in 1953 and have lived together ever since. It was then they built a Gay social circle. Each came from a tight knit Jewish family. It is astonishing when considering the stereotypes of the age, that both families have remained close and intermingled on family occasions. The two are inseparable so they participate as a unit in holidays and rites of passage.

Together they have an avuncular manner; it was almost as if they were interviewing me at moments, their interest

was so constant. They bickered affectionately, corrected one another, and commented on what each other had to say. They also commented extensively on the difficulties they have each had at self-acceptance as Gay men and the various strategies they employed to overcome the shame that was inculcated in them during their youth. Both have considerable interest in art, theater and music and focused on how these played a role in keeping their relationship together and in building a Gay consciousness within them.

Professionally, Robert taught music for most of his adult life both privately and at the university level. He also made a mark as a theater and music critic and knew many actors and musicians, some of them quite famous. Joseph inherited his family's restaurant supply business but sold it in the early 1970's to enter publishing. Their commitment to liberal causes was evident as long ago as the late 50's when they purchased one of the first integrated cooperatives in Philadelphia. Today, they live in a comfortably cluttered cooperative in Center City that they purchased about thirty years ago. It is cluttered with books, records, compact disks, baby grand piano and dozens of photographs of performers on the walls. They consider themselves quite fortunate to have had a relationship of such durability, certain that its length is unusual for either Gay or straight couples. Today, they are retired but still lead active lives attending music and theater events quite

regularly. They never miss a Broadway show. They are also active in AIDS organizations having served on the boards of some of them.

At one point in the interview, I asked them if they had kept photo albums. And, of course, being inveterate collectors, they had. The use of this kind of stimulus for recollection is common, though I regret to say that this was the only occasion I employed it. It was productive here as a means of furthering the conversation and for me it was particularly helpful in understanding the clothing styles and domestic life of this earlier period.

The one person I interviewed who has been truly poor most of his life was Neal Maxwell. He was born in 1927 in one of the poorest working-class sections of Philadelphia. His father died when he was young and lived with his mother and grandmother. Growing up in this tough environment he was also poorly educated--his own words were "the equivalent of a third grade education" so impoverished was his public school experience. In his early teens he met someone a little older that he came to think of as a "mentor." In spite of this being one of the toughest areas of the city, incongruously, this young man was familiar with the arts and literature. He introduced the young Neal to a small group of Gay men and lesbians. Many of these people were his closest companions for years. He also began to notice the clusters of Gay men hanging out in Rittenhouse Square. Other events

around this time, when he was seventeen, led him to realize that a Gay life was what he wanted. An astute teacher took an interest in him. He told Neal that though he was now in a period of turmoil, he would soon find that there were others like him and that a whole other world existed inhabited by them. In retrospect, Neal found this conversation very kind and helpful and, even then, it served as a real source of comfort. Interestingly, this sensitive teacher never mentioned the word Gay or any other that might suggest homosexuality.

Of course, he was drafted and served in the navy for eighteen months, beginning in 1944. After the war he went to Provincetown, MA with some of the Gay friends he met in the service. Neal later was a bartender in one of the most famous and longest lasting Gay bars in Philadelphia and has since remained friends with his co-workers. By this time he lived in Center City near Spruce and 12th streets with his mother and grandmother. He often had lovers and some of these monogamous relationships lasted many years, the most recent one happened when he was in his sixties.

More than anyone I interviewed, Neal really enjoyed telling stories and delighted in recalling some of the more outré aspects of Gay life and was especially articulate on the differences between Gay life then and today. Relations with the law provided another focus for the conversation. Perhaps because he had worked in a bar, he more than the

other people I spoke with saw many police raids and arrests. But more than that, he was also more concerned about and spoke more often of the legalized injustices that the courts imposed on Gay men of the time.

John Taylor was born in the working class town of Coatesville, PA which he left in 1944 under very distressing circumstance. The small business he started failed and he was accused of being queer though he says he had done nothing sexual with anyone at that point. His military experience was limited because his health failed and he was discharged. Life was difficult during his twenties with severe health and financial problems.

He moved to Wilmington, living with an aunt. Later his parents moved there as well, and they shared a large house living in separate apartments. It was during this period that his social life began to incorporate other Gay men. He fell in with a group of Gay men, even though at first he did not realize they were Gay. He met one of them in a bar and then often met with this small group of ten or so for dinner at a local restaurant. For many years he straddled the fence between coming out in Gay life and remaining in the closet. His social life was almost exclusively male, however. A women he met during his time in Delaware taught him the restaurant business which provided him an entree into a career that served him the rest of his adult life.

The food and beverage business suited his temperament.

It gave him the ability, which he liked, to move whenever he wanted. Consequently, he moved to New York and worked in the Carlisle Hotel. His wanderlust provoked him to become part of the world of seasonal work which led him south to Florida in winter and back to the north in the summer. Primarily he worked as a food manager for hotel restaurants, ordering supplies and food stuffs. But he had other duties as well including being a bartender. His social life concentrated on his co-workers. When his mother got sick as she grew older, he settled back in Philadelphia and worked at Penn for on and off for several years in the mid-1960's. When money was tight, he would also work in hotels on the New Jersey coast during the summer months. During that part of his life, he bought a house, found a lover and settled down to a degree. His social life expanded to include a larger group of men with whom he met regularly to have dinner and work together on household projects.

As John grew older, he bought property both in Philadelphia and Florida which simplified his life. Now, he was able to go back and forth with ease and since in both locales he had other rental units, he was able to live off of that income. This financial security also gives him time to volunteer in AIDS hospices and old age homes. Perhaps because he has so much to occupy his time, he does not consider himself retired. It is also obvious that he is enjoying his life now more than ever before.

Taylor is a quiet man. The interview with him was more low key than the others. It took place in one of the apartments in a house he owns, which is a couple of blocks from where I live. The apartment is sparsely furnished making it clear that he lives there only part of the year. He is an appealing, blunt, honest, person in many ways, if a bit dour at times. More overtly than most of his contemporaries, he wants to give something to the Gay community in the way of organizational skill and time.

Hugh Lee is still working in the same job he had thirty years ago. He was born in one of Philadelphia's working class neighborhoods and attended Girard College for secondary school. Though he began college at one of the extension branches of Penn State, he had the chance to take a job at a radio station in Fort Lauderdale with a scholarship at one of the private colleges in Florida. Throughout his adolescence he had Gay sexual encounters but it was only after his move to Florida that he became part of a Gay social circle.

The position at the radio station was mostly clerical, constructing FCC logs and the like, so it was not very satisfying. But the move to Florida gave Lee his first real independence from his family and he enjoyed it. He would even stay in Florida through the summers working in hotels and other service industries that were part of the tourist trade. The draft forced him to return to Philadelphia, but

he was exempted for health reasons.

Since he was very interested in the performing arts, he went to New York after college to give professional acting a try. After about nine months he realized it was not going to work out so he came back to Philadelphia where he could find some work acting both professionally and not. At first, he worked at one of the large hotels in center city. In his second job back home, he worked for one of the bus lines as a terminal manager. One of the appealing things about that job was that one of his co-workers was Gay and they could occasionally go bar hopping. While working out at one of the "Y"s in center city he met an older straight man who told him of a position at another "Y" in the city. Hugh feels strongly that his connection with Girard College opened doors for him in the job market. He worked at this "Y" for nine years. Now, for eighteen years, he has worked as a manager for one of the federal military agencies that is responsible for social services and entertainment.

When he first returned to Philadelphia, he tried going to some of the places there that he was told about in Florida finally finding a circle of friends at the Allegro Bar with whom he is friendly to this day. He had a lover for fifteen years who lived with him and his mother before she died.

Thomas Brockbank was born in Florida in the mid-thirties but his family moved to Philadelphia when he was

ten. He served in the military twice. First due to the draft during the Korean conflict and then in the early sixties he was called back during the Cuban missile crisis. He came out into Gay life during the mid-fifties after meeting a man who ran a card shop in Center City Philadelphia. He remembers this man very fondly as a person who wanted to "mother" him. Evidently, this card shop was a focal point for many young Gays at the time and sold cards, souvenirs and other items that were considered quite risqué for the period.

Brockbank's professional life was spent in his family's construction business though later he became a salesman in elite Philadelphia jewelry stores. Since he loves being with people and talking with them he loved being a salesman. He also married when he was twenty-seven but realized the marriage was a disaster from the start. Not only was the fact that he was Gay a source of difficulty but also his wife remained disproportionately attached to her mother making it very difficult for them to establish a life of their own. He has had two long term male companions. He has been with the most recent one for nearly ten years.

The interview took place in the lobby of the large apartment building Tom lived in. He was concerned about his lover's health so he did not want to have him disturbed even by having company in the living room. It made the interview much less structured because it was constantly being interrupted by Tom greeting his friends and acquaintances.

It also made the tape of the interview difficult to listen to since there was also a lot of background noise. Nevertheless, it was obvious he enjoyed the experience since he admits being an inveterate talker.

Tom's life has been mostly low key and characterized by him as being mostly domestic. He was not as involved in Gay bar life as most of the other people I interviewed. Instead he focused on his friends and had a tight group that he has kept up with over the past thirty years. Some of these friends really became his family. One in particular was seen by Tom as being almost saintly. He said he could call this friend for anything any time and believed that this man would do the same for anyone.

What is evident from these profiles is that Gay men of the era displayed a remarkable degree of class and ethnic diversity. And that they integrated along these parameters to a very large extent. This integration needs more examination since we know very little about how economic and educational classes cohere in Gay life.²¹ Another key feature that was discovered is the similarity of Gay experience across the United States. Much of the valuable work in Gay history has focused on particular locales

²¹. This convergence of classes among Gays has been noted since the beginning of the modern Gay movement. Edward Carpenter, who might be thought of as a Gay William Morris, examined this phenomenon on the heels of Whitman and Forster later took up the topic. See The Intermediate Sex (London: Allen and Unwin, 1952), especially pp. 76-78.

demonstrating the depth of Gay culture. What I found, serendipitously, due to the constraints my working life placed on my field work, is that there is much in common in the experience of Gay men no matter where they lived in the United States.

These men gave me access to the world I sought to understand. To reduce them to a "source" is to deny each of them their flesh and blood and feelings. Like Forster's Maurice, I wish to condescend to such levels.²² None of them was significant in a value system that would emphasize financial success or roles on the public stage. To my knowledge, their opinions were not sought by political leaders or captains of industry. Yet in my life, their presence will always loom large.

The next chapters discuss what they taught me.

²². In Maurice, Forster contrasts Clive, who sees the only possible relationship between two men being platonic, with Maurice who seeks a lifelong friend. In their final meeting Maurice says to Clive, "As I said before, I'm not here to get advice, nor to talk about thoughts and ideas either. I'm flesh and blood, if you'll condescend to such low things--" (New York: Norton, 1971), p. 243.

CHAPTER 5: THEY RISE TOGETHER, THEY SLOWLY CIRCLE AROUND

"My tread scares the wood-drake and the wood-duck on my
distant and day-long ramble,
They rise together, they slowly circle around."
--Walt Whitman, Leaves of Grass, "Song of Myself," 13:13-14

"Everybody got to know everybody."

The following three chapters come more from the men I interviewed than from me. I try to give a voice to the way(s) they lived then as much as I can. Where quotation marks are used, they are words that they used themselves even if only to characterize an event, person or place.¹ Obviously, I am employing my structure, rather than theirs, to this effort and though I am imposing an order that does not really exist in the interviews themselves, I think the themes are authentic. Where names are used they are modeled after the pseudonyms used in chapter 4 but are not necessarily coincident with the person characterized there.

Folklore scholarship demands that attention be given to authenticity even if one knows that true authenticity is chimera. Nevertheless, considerable attention has been paid in the discipline to accurate representation of what and how people say what they do. The guiding principles for me have been pioneered by Hymes and Tedlock. Though I began thinking that Tedlock's focus on pause in speech was the most

¹. I will relegate printed documentary evidence or corroboration mostly to footnotes. The novels and reports I cite were sources mentioned by the men themselves. Other references to the period are journalistic reports or published reminiscences and diaries by Gay men.

important organizing principle, now I am not sure. Hymes makes the point that use of conjunctions is an important priority. Most of my interviews did not include extended narratives so I cannot resolve this conflict or illumine its relevance among Gay men or in life history research. I can, however, say that the argument is more difficult to resolve than I thought.²

This chapter discusses how people found one another, thought about finding one another, and the places that were central in the enterprise of making connections to Gay life. The Gay bar is the focus of the second section of the chapter. Other locales will be discussed in the next

². The key works are Dell Hymes, "In vain I Tried to tell you." Essays in Native American Ethnopoetics (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981) and Dennis Tedlock, The Spoken Word and the Work of Interpretation (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983). Though there are only a couple of extended narratives transcribed here, I wanted to give them the respect I thought they deserved by providing accurate, clear transcriptions. Also see the experiments in the ethnopoetic journal Alcheringa (1970-1980) edited by Tedlock and Jerome Rothenberg. Dell Hymes and Virginia Hymes have also noted the ways in which pause and conjunction interact in spoken narrative and tried to resolve some of these issues. Virginia Hymes also provides the clearest explication of the method of presentation in "Warm Spring Sahaptin Narrative Analysis," pp. 62-102 in Joel Sherzer and Anthony C. Woodbury, eds., Native American Discourse: Poetics and Rhetoric (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987). Also relevant are Dell Hymes, "Helen Sekaquaptewa's 'Coyote and the Birds': Rhetorical Analysis of a Hopi Coyote Story," Anthropological Linguistics, 34(1992), pp. 45-72 and Kathleen A. Danker, "Because of this I am Called the Foolish One: Felix White, Sr's Interpretations of the Winnebago Trickster," pp. 505-528 in Arnold Krupat, ed., New Voices in Native American Literary Criticism (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1993).

chapter.

While at least one of my contacts thought that I would find that everyone's experiences would be totally different, I found remarkable similarities if in different locales. Remember, the people I interviewed lived all over the United States though I interviewed them primarily in Philadelphia, San Francisco and New York. Many of them also lived in other places during the period that interested me so other cities appear as well.

Many felt terribly isolated as young men. They were aware of their circumstances and sought, when possible, to take risks toward finding others. "They did find each other and mainly, they found each other out of a very strong need. If people needed to have other people so desperately...it was a terrible time, it really was a terrible time."

The goal was to stand out but only if a decision was made to do so. "You only stand out if you want to stand out." The circumstances and timing mattered. It was also important to decide to whom one wanted to stand out. It could be that in some circumstances it might be useful to take advantage of straight stereotypes of being Gay. On other occasions it would be desirable to only be recognizably Gay to other Gays. The location mattered. One could decide to be blatantly Gay with dress or hair coloring

or jewelry. One could innocuously offer a man a cigarette.³ You might look at someone a "silly millisecond" to long. Finally, a connection was made by invoking subtle clues allowing the aphorism "it takes one to know one" to come into play.⁴ This ability called by some men learned and by others intuitive was essential for functioning and survival.

Central High, Philadelphia, the most prestigious public school in the city to which students had to specifically apply and be admitted, had some students that did in fact stand out. In the late forties, some students wore high heels, carried pocket books and wore makeup to class. It was said that one in particular was a favorite sexual partner of some of the football players at the high school. For some unknown reason, Friday was a day that men dress this way.

3. Donald Vining records someone applying this technique with him on August 18, 1949, A Gay Diary: 1946-1954 (New York: the Pepys Press, 1980), p. 222. Other examples of circumlocutious pick up lines, as well as the cigarette one, are given by Donald Webster Cory, The Homosexual in America: a Subjective Approach (New York: Greenberg, 1951), pp. 116-118.

⁴. I could not help but wonder if this expression had its origins among Gay people since it comes up so often. Jess Stearn makes this assertion less preposterous in his The Sixth Man (New York: Doubleday, 1961). "'It takes lavender to smell lavender,' said one homosexual, referring to the prevailing feeling among homosexuals that 'it takes one to know one.'" (p. 167) See also, Vining Gay Diary: 1946-1954, p. 107, when he attempted to pick up someone he was certain was Gay but was mistaken. He concluded that the adage has "little foundation in fact." Bartlett Jere Whiting's Modern Proverbs and Proverbial Sayings (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), p. 462, does not provide much help only giving citations back to 1955. Wolfgang Mieder (personal communication) thinks the expression has its origins among African-Americans.

This behavior, though recognized as "outrageous" by the men I interviewed who observed it was still thought of as being gutsy and bold.

By the time one got into his twenties other options came into play. In New York you could meet people anywhere, it was said by more than one man. One man moved to New York to seek a career in the theater and was glad New York was so open. Though he worked at night in a restaurant, he would easily meet people at auditions. The transient place he lived in New York had many Gay people. One man lived in a guest house on the Upper East side that was all male.⁵ He lived there in order to meet people who "had the same inclinations." Unfortunately they were mostly older men who were not interesting to him. In Philadelphia, the streets were less Gay friendly, but people remember cruising Spruce Street west of Broad Street anytime of the day or night as long ago as the late forties.

Even in the thirties Rittenhouse Square, Philadelphia was a place for Gays to meet.⁶ "Everybody knew who hung out

⁵. George Chauncey mentions the boardinghouses of an earlier era in Gay New York (New York: Basic Books, 1994), p. 164.

⁶. Rittenhouse Square is one of the wonders of Philadelphia and has attracted many urban planners by its success as a thriving, vital park in a city, most famously by Jane Jacobs, The Death and Life of Great American Cities (New York: Vintage Books, 1961), pp. 92-97 and elsewhere. Donald Vining mentions it had a deserved reputation as a cruising ground in 1948, A Gay Diary, 1946-1954, pp. 125-126 and also parks in New York that were good for meeting men as well, p. 15. Marc Stein also documents the importance of

in Rittenhouse Square." The police occasionally raided it, bringing paddy wagons to the entrances and arresting everybody in the Square. One man started going there at fourteen. He discovered it by accident one early summer evening. He noticed many men, some effeminate, some not, hanging around the square.⁷ People would also drive around the perimeter of the Square in pursuit of finding a partner. This group was called the "carriage trade." If someone got tired of sitting in the Square talking to his friends, he might say, "I'm tired of chewing the rag, I'm going to go work the carriage trade." It was considered bad form, an "unwritten gentlemen's agreement" to talk to someone once they decided to do such serious cruising. The comradery was fondly remembered.

Another man went to Rittenhouse Square and sat there. He was told about the places to go in Philadelphia, his hometown, when he was a student in Florida. He could not find these bars but since he was told about the square, he knew where to begin his search. He looked for an appropriate person in the Square to find out where the bars were. Even if people did not go there to cruise, they knew about it, sometimes even avoiding it on Sunday afternoons when it was

Rittenhouse Square in Gay life and quotes Vining as well, "The City of Sisterly and Brotherly Loves: the Making of Lesbian and Gay Movements in Greater Philadelphia, 1948-1972," Diss. University of Pennsylvania, 1994, pp. 203-206

⁷. He said there were hundreds but I would imagine he was employing storyteller's license.

crowded with Gay people, because they did not want to be associated with it.

Nevertheless, hanging out in Rittenhouse Square could be dangerous. A working class neighborhood called "Taney" was situated to the southwest and sometimes young men from that Irish community would come into the Square to beat up Gays. People would yell "the Taneys are coming" and the Square would empty. It could only take a few thugs to accomplish the clearing.

Other public spaces served well as sources of information. It was possible in Daytona to find an entry into the Gay world by making anonymous sexual contacts on the boardwalk in the evening. People would wear casual clothes and make "a look, a gesture." Most of men were older than the man I spoke with but he had a lot to learn socially "and I was more than willing."

Colleges and high schools, particularly boarding schools also gave men a chance to connect. In the all male high school at which one man boarded there were sexual contacts made by virtually everybody but the unstated "code of honor" was that you never put someone else's penis in your mouth. If it became common knowledge you were ostracized. And in some cases it did become known or rumored, and the person was scorned. Clearly, performing fellatio was a marker that put someone over the line from merely engaging in same-sex activity into a new category. He

did not know anyone who did not have some sexual experience with another male at this school. In spite of these boarding school sexual contacts, he did not initially consider himself Gay. He thought it was "quite natural." But when he had the contacts in Daytona, he realized he was more interested in men than women and it was then he pinpoints "coming out" in retrospect, though he does not think the term was used then.

Another met a guy at a urinal in a men's room in college after making eye contact. He asked my informant to make a date to get together. Later they went back to the man's apartment, became friends and, incredibly he got to know this guy's wife. Ostensibly she did not know about their relationship, but my friend thought that was impossible. Later, he realized that there were other bathrooms on this Midwestern campus that were locations for sexual liaisons. They had peepholes and he continually stumbled on people engaged in sexual activity.

College and university libraries were also potential locations for meeting people when their sexuality was in first bloom. Older libraries were not well lit and usually had less formal floor plans than they do today so it was possible to be alone in them quite easily. In one library there were little recesses in the walls that accommodated two men comfortably. "The stacks were like a maze." Once one of my informants went into the stacks and found two men with

all their clothes off, engaged in sodomy. "They didn't even bother to hide."

While in college, one University of Arizona student would go to Pershing Square in Los Angeles, a very long drive indeed, where Gays hung around.⁸ Even if one man characterized it as "low life" it still attracted a wide range of men. Even in Tucson, this Arizona alumnus remembered, there was a square where people hung out and people would either drive around or walk around cruising. Since Arizona was less open than Los Angeles, people would just have sex in the car. He also said the square in Tucson attracted many Hispanics.

Another man got his first impression of Gay people through the library in the small town in which he was born. He read in books (unfortunately, he could not remember which ones) that homosexuals liked the color green and heard from classmates in high school that they could not whistle. He remembered this odd ability gap to be corroborated in a book he read. Some taught him that it was only homosexuals who wore glasses. An expression after coming out was to ask if someone "had an ear for music" or if "he was a friend of

⁸. Stearn verifies Pershing Square as an active cruising location. The Sixth Man, p. 51 as do two of the men whose life histories were recorded by Keith Vacha in Quiet Fire: Memoirs of Older Gay Men (Trumansburg, NY: the Crossing Press, 1985), p. 130, p. 171. One of the men Vacha spoke with was told about Pershing Square was he was five or six!

Dorothy's."⁹ This last expression is still used, though most people today would think it refers to Dorothy from the Wizard of Oz because of the admiration of Judy Garland by many Gay men, one man felt it referred to Dorothy Kilgallen because she had a reputation for hanging around Gay men.

Another technique for locating a sexual contact, though more direct than most others, was shaking someone's hand and tickling the other person's palm with your middle finger. This was an in group signal for wanting sex with him. If the person was interested, they would make conversation. This technique could be and was used virtually anywhere.

The military as a single sex institution provided opportunity. One firm memory was related of navy men piled in a taxi, "I had to sit on someone's lap, he started to make the moves on my crotch and I got scared." He also knew someone whom later he would have called a "nellie queen" but curiously, when one considers the gender conformity one imagines then, this queen was not ostracized at all.¹⁰

One man met a man while he was in the army through making eye contact with him outside a military hospital and

⁹. Another common expression was "dropping pins." One of the four subjects in Robert C. Reinhart's A History of Shadows (Boston: Alyson, 1986) explicates it "Dropping pins? That means that he was giving me hints that he was gay." p. 18.

¹⁰. Allan Bérubé, Coming Out Under Fire: The History of Gay Men and Women in World War II (New York: Free Press, 1990) p. 53 also makes the point that gender conformity may not have been as oppressive as we think today.

inviting him for coffee. They were in Boston and tried to find a hotel room but because one was an officer and the other was an enlisted man they found it difficult because hotels would not allow such a combination. (Evidently, the same was true for Gay bars there.) The officer had to introduce the enlisted man to the desk clerk as his brother.

The men's rooms in train and bus stations were a common sense place for people to meet.¹¹ With men's genitals exposed it was possible to determine whether or not someone was sexually interested. Keep in mind, too, that the urinals were much more exposed than they are now; they were trough like commonly. One man met a good friend through this method and the friend introduced him to a group of friends.

Philadelphia's Thirtieth Street and Broad Street Stations (the latter now demolished) were spoken of frequently as was the so-called "Chinese Wall." The wall was the barrier created by the train tracks between Thirtieth Street Station running through to central Philadelphia. It was a famous cruising ground for Gay men because of its isolation.¹²

Even a simple invitation to a party could provide a

¹¹. One of Reinhart's quartet of characters thought his encounters in a bus station tea room decided his future (History of Shadows, p. 31). Stearn is more judgmental in his appraisal (The Sixth Man, p. 51).

¹². It was also known as "vaseline alley" as were other Gay cruising locations if Vacha, Quiet Fire, p. 172, is any indication. At the risk of being pedantic, they would be called "vaseline alley" since vaseline was a commonly used lubricant for sex between males.

clue. One man was asked to a party by one of his neighbors who wanted to be clear about who was going to be there. "He said to me one time, he said, 'I'm having a party. Would you like to come?' and I said, 'well,' he said, "but now, its going to be all guys.' and I said, 'ok' and he says do you go to certain bars, that's what he asked me and I said 'I haven't yet.'"¹³ In other cases an older person took an avuncular interest in a younger man who was perceived as on the cusp of coming out or being troubled by his sexual feelings. As described in the previous chapter, one Philadelphia man had a teacher who "was an extremely wonderful person" who said to him

"I know
that you're in turmoil
because you probably think you're isolated
in your, in your
sexual pro-
proclivities
and he said
but you'll find when you get a little older
that there's a whole world a awaiting you there
and you can live a life...
he never mentioned the word Gay or never really, you
know, mentioned homosexuality,
it was all done with innuendo
but a a very genteel person,
and he said but you'll find that there are restaurants
where
people of the ah

¹³. Sometimes using the word "Gay," before it became commonly used as a synonym for homosexual, to refer to these bars was employed. Cory, The Homosexual in America, p. 118, suggests it use as a code word as in "You should [go there]. It's quite a gay place." He also documents the reality that news about Gay bars was passed on primarily by word of mouth: Donald Webster Cory and John P. LeRoy, The Homosexual and His Society: a View From Within (New York: Citadel, 1963), p. 106.

same persuasion as you go,
 there are resorts,
 resort towns,
 you know, whole towns in the summer you can go and
 there you can live in center city,
 there are parts of center city where you can freely
 live
 if you leave your parents, you can't do both.
 But if you decide to break away.
 And he was an extremely considerate person
 telling a young person who really didn't know
 where you know
 anything was or how to go about [coming out].

At first this young man thought his teacher was inviting him
 over for a sexual encounter and was nervous about that
 potentiality. In retrospect, he was very grateful for the
 attention and obviously feels indebted to this mentor.

When he was in his teens, this same man met some older
 Gay men who were socially liberal who invited him to join
 them in a discussion group. Though not overtly Quaker, they
 had the kind of consciousness often associated with Quakers
 and they did in fact, attend Quaker meeting now and then. He
 attended this small group, his first exposure to Gay people,
 with people of different races, sexual identities and
 economic class finding it as source of comfort and respite
 then and now.

Some saw, even then, that there were many different
 crowds one could belong to in Gay life and the importance of
 the first group into which you entered the life.¹⁴ It would
 be interesting to know how people map these groups. Many

¹⁴. Cory makes this point, The Homosexual in America,
 pp. 92-99. Some have made typologies of Gay people but I
 find them unsatisfying.

talked about a flamboyant crowd that was obviously Gay. Others saw a more middle class Gay man as being the norm. Another group would be men who were more "butch" or tough. One man felt it was all learned behavior--learning how to be Gay. "You could develop and get a full journeyman's card as a 'screaming queen' in six months."

"Bars where you usually first got to know Gay people."

"What bars do people go to here?"

"People slunk into bars."

Sometimes it was necessary to use nicknames for the bars to cover the fact that you knew about them but did not want to betray too much. One black bar that called the SK was also known as Sally's Kitchen, though its real name was Spider Kelly's, as a way of indicating that someone might know about it.

Other bars could be located because they were widely known among all people in a town. "There was a bar that had a reputation and I assumed it was Gay because when I went in it had a female impersonator." The men who performed there dressed up in drag and lippped synced recorded songs that were bawdy or full of double entendre. This would be a nightly performance with the same person doing the same songs. Rip Taylor, the comedian who often played an outrageous drunk, was there often. It was on a strip in Daytona that had many bars, and straights often came in because performers were well known. No affection between men

was allowed however. It had a long bar, a stage, table service. Other bars in Daytona were Gay friendly. In this Southern location people tended to dress casually in the bars. Some wore Bermuda shorts but these were seen then as being Gay. As in other bars, staring was a way of making contact. The next step, my informant remembered here, was to move next to the person, buy a drink for him and strike up a conversation. Summer vacations were the main time for making contact in this coastal town. Many hotel workers often would invite George back or friends with bigger apartments would allow him to use their homes if he needed a place for his liaisons. He met some fellow college students in bars. Though they would socialize in the bars, once back on campus they would only acknowledge one another in passing such was their fear of being recognized as Gay in their school.

The Black Cat in San Francisco was among the most famous Gay bars ever and was so popular on Sunday afternoons that there was a line waiting to get in.¹⁵ It was small and crowded with benches along the wall. Jose, the host, would come outside to greet his customers who mostly came in groups rather than individually to find sexual partners.¹⁶

¹⁵. More than one Gay man acquainted with Gay San Francisco thought the Black Cat deserved historic landmark status.

¹⁶. Jose Sarria, "the Nightingale of Montgomery Street," was one of the great figures of 1950's San Francisco and of Gay life in this country. A sympathetic biography of him is a large gap in Gay studies.

He performed operas in drag, playing all the roles in different costumes. One man especially remembered his Aida complete with the dusty rug he used as a cape. The audience would raucously cheer and yell. Since it was across the street from the police station it was an easy mark for a raid. It was then and at closing time that people recall the singing of "God Save us Nelly Queens."¹⁷

Other cities had famous personalities. In New Orleans there was a famous drag Gay bartender named Candy Lee whose real name was Amos McFarland. One of his tricks was to take a flashlight and point it at the crotch of guys as they came in. This would usually evoke applause.¹⁸

Music in the bars was usually quite loud. In the forties, the big band music was in favor and where dancing

¹⁷. Most people who went to the Black Cat remember singing the song. See, for instance, George's reminiscence in The Word is Out: Stories of Some of Our Lives (San Francisco: New Glide Publications; New York: Delacorte Press, 1978) by Nancy Adair and Casey Adair, pp. 72-73. In "Before Stonewall" Serria encourages a reunion of friends from the Black Cat to sing it again introducing it saying "Give thanks for what we are." The text in the film was: God save us nelly queens/God save us queens/From every mountainside/Long may we live or die/God save us nelly queens. The tune, used ironically, of course, was America and God Save the Queen.

¹⁸. Gore Vidal described a "soothing" New Orleans Gay bar in The City and the Pillar (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1965), pp. 106-107. This book played a significant role in the consciousness of nearly everyone I interviewed from the man who simply commented that it "was an accurate portrayal of Gay life" to the more circumspect man who "read it under the covers." Vidal concedes that he knew less about the Gay world then he let on, however (p. 245). Vining found it compelling and discussed it with his friends when it was published, A Gay Diary: 1946-1954, p. 82, p. 88

took place it would be fox trot or jitterbug music. Slow dancing would alternate with faster dances. Helen O'Connor was also popular. Fifties type of music. Peggy Lee, show tunes, Frank Sinatra, were played on the juke box.

One famous bar in Philadelphia and probably its longest lived one occupied three floors and had an unmarked door. It had previously been known as the New Look and later, the Allegro. It was said to be owned by a married man who had a boyfriend. The boyfriend would sing there and had an Irish tenor voice singing hackneyed romantic songs. Two sons of the owner also worked there. Even with the owner and his sons there, thugs would come in to start fights.

The circular bar on the first floor was ideal for picking up men because it was possible to see everyone. The decor on this floor changed often, sometimes mirrors, tin foil. Early on, the walls had bas-relief papier-mâché figures hanging on them. There was a baby grand piano on a platform played for a long time by a man named "Bernice." There were six or seven tables in a raised area toward the front. The second floor served food and had entertainment, usually big name performers who had seen better days. At one time it was called the "Brass and Braid" room for its decor. It had military memorabilia on the walls with paintings of patriotic scenes.

One performer who was especially memorable was Francis Renault who had danced for European royalty earlier in the

century. The lore about him includes an affair with one of the kings of Sweden. When he appeared at the Allegro, he was about 75 years old and not in very good shape. It was said that he had his toes shot off in the First World War. More than just a "has been," he was completely unknown to the crowd of younger men who attended the bar. He did a kind of Spanish Dance in drag. Another performer was referred to as a dramatic soprano, but was really a countertenor. He did operatic skits in drag. Apparently, his voice was very unusual and it was thought by professional musicians that if he took his voice seriously he could have a career. As it was, he ended up doing club work mostly.

The third floor was also a bar, called the "Bohemian Room" and sometimes showed movies. The Allegro was the favorite of many people, never suffered financially, and was always crowded to its last days in the 1970's. Several men met people there with whom they are friendly to this day. For one man it functioned as a social club of sorts. Many people who went lived in the same part of the city he did and they would take the same route home together after a night out.

Maxines, another venerable Philadelphia bar, was more elegant and dressy, had fondly remembered entertainment and had a more mature crowd. One man recalled making a faux pas in this more socially conscious bar and was very embarrassed. He ordered a "high ball" which was whiskey and

ginger ale, rather than scotch and water or a martini, more typical drinks of the era. People laughed out loud. It was seen as being an "old lady's drink." Partly because he was younger he felt more self-conscious making a social mistake. It served food, had several seatings in its restaurant though the early hours of the evening were largely straight. There was a lot of singing there around the piano. The decor has been described as being like a coffin--plush couches, with a lot of velvet on the walls with draped velvet on the ceilings. Some people found it claustrophobic. It was a good place to make friends as well. One couple got introduced to other couples there and socialized with them. Nevertheless, it attracted many men and was quite famous even for out of town visitors. Rosalind Russell was said to have gone there when she was in Philadelphia. Blacks were decidedly not welcome. To discourage blacks, they would require them to have three or four pieces of identification.

A less chic bar was called the Pirate Ship near Locust and 13th streets--it was a "low down bar" or as one man said "it was the forerunner of a leather bar." The maitre d' was known as "Miss Juice." This bar was also the home of many unusual people including a man named "Long Lost Paradise." He would wear little white gloves and a Hoover dress, which was kind of wrap around. Teddy, another character who frequented the Pirate Ship, would do Balinese dances. But it also attracted very tough gay men on the order of the

stereotype biker Marlon Brando portrayed in the "Wild Ones." More than one person recalled fights breaking out at the Pirate Ship.¹⁹ It was interesting to me that several also recalled men wearing earrings there in the fifties. Perhaps the pirate motif made it acceptable or encouraged what then was novel adornment for men.

It would also attract straights who were interested in the other side of life as well as Gays who only wanted to have brief sexual encounters or one night stands. Another tawdry bar was the Ritz near city hall where one man was shot by his lover. It attracted drag queens and very tough men. One bar in Philadelphia that lasts to this day began as a bar that catered to both Gays and straights. The straights occupied the main bar near the entrance and Gays went off to the left. It, too, was a rather dingy place "straight out of Genet" according to the man who told me about it.²⁰

Several bars were clustered near Ninth and Vine and Franklin Square. These were quite tough and though they catered to straights primarily, there were also Gay men who went there particularly of the "plucked eyebrow" set.²¹

¹⁹. Cory and LeRoy write of the emergence of tough Gay bars in The Homosexual and His Society, pp. 108-109.

²⁰. Apparently even mentioning Genet, Gide or Wilde could be considered a means of indicating to another person that one was Gay. See James Barr, Quartrefoil (1950) (Boston: Alyson, 1982), p. 9, p. 124.

²¹. Evidently bleached hair and plucked eyebrows were not uncommon, Reinhart, History of Shadows, p. 39.

During the fifties this was one of the toughest neighborhoods in the city because it was near the docks, and the Square itself was a place for hobos to congregate. It was Philadelphia's own Tenderloin. One bar on Front Street had entertainment with performers doing such things as tap dancing on roller skates, singing Irish tenor songs or women who were double-jointed doing acrobatics. Gay people enjoyed the camp aspects of it.

Many Philadelphians fondly remember Louise's of Atlantic City.²² During the summer people would go in the late afternoon in their bathing suits. There was dancing there. Some people deliberately created a different persona for themselves using alternative names when they went to Louise's. It was a large dark smoky place. Louise, elderly, even then, was well loved by the bar's patrons and she adored them back. "If you knew Louise, you were in." Another man, who was quite young when he first went, remembers her checking the companions he left with to be sure they were not going to hurt him. She had a reputation as a good Catholic woman and often wore a large orchid. Many Catholic

²². Atlantic City attracted Gay men from more than Philadelphia according to Stearn. In The Sixth Man he observed "Walking five abreast on the Atlantic City boardwalk, homosexuals clad in bright shirts and flannels spotted a group approaching from the opposite direction. As they passed, they traded searching stares and the respective end men, without breaking stride, simultaneously cried out, 'Swish.'" As one explained later, 'It was a spontaneous sort of greeting, like two Americans recognizing each other abroad.'" (p. 59).

men felt when they spent their money at Louise's that they did not have to give in the collection plate at Mass since they already had paid their religious dues.²³

Louise was also willing to set up a bar in Philadelphia called the Drury Lane. She let a couple of Gay lovers run it. It was initially a classier place meant to compete with Maxine's.

Louise's was so well established that when the 1964 Democratic National Convention was held in Atlantic City, she was able to get it exempted from the general crackdown on Gay bars and other establishments that might embarrass the city. She was said to have told the authorities, "all right, you can close my bar but I think the deputy district attorney and the mayor's son will object." The people who told me about her gutsy remark were not certain whether the story was apocryphal, but he concluded, "the bar remained open."

²³. There is a phenomenon, which is hinted at several times in my interviews, of strong connections between protective women such as Louise and Gay men in this nascent era of contemporary Gay culture. One of the few (only?) memoirs of a Gay bar owner of the era is, I think, part of this phenomenon, is Gay Bar by Helen P. Branson (San Francisco: Pan-Graphic Press, 1957). She dedicates it "To the boys." The copy I used, from the University of Illinois library, is signed by Helen "To Russ and Bob, To your happiness." One of the advertisements for Gay Bar noted extravagantly "the humor...the heartbreak...the piercing reality" and that it was "Non-fiction that is more penetrating and perceptive than a novel." The one illustration in the book is of a chicken protecting her brood, a metaphor Branson also employs for her relationship with her patrons.

On the way to Atlantic City there was a dance hall called the Lodge for Gay men out on the highway. It had a screened in room. One man remembers on one occasion there meeting a famous dancer who had danced with Debbie Reynolds in several movies. A similar bar in Andalusia was called the Barn and was very popular as an after-hours club. Because bars closed early, except for private parties, it was used primarily as a front. An old birthday cake was kept on hand so that if it were raided for violating the bar curfew, the owners could say that a private party was taking place. They would change the names on the cake weekly. In addition to the wilting cake they would also put up crepe paper.

Similarly, outside San Antonio there was a bar on a country road called the Country Club.²⁴ It had Spanish decor in three small rooms. Because it was remote, it was possible for men to dance together there. "Dancing would not have happened if there was even the remote chance of a stranger coming in." As in other bars of the period there was a bouncer or door man guarding the place. It attracted many service men from the various army and air force bases in the region, though there had been a witch hunt of homosexuals at one local base. There was a total breakdown of the military hierarchy in the bar, so that privates and colonels mingled, though it must be remembered it was all white and no

²⁴. We need more data but I think there must have been many Gay bars that were located in rural areas outside the purview of metropolitan police.

Mexican-Americans were allowed. Because of the military presence it attracted men largely from twenty to forty.

The person who told me about this bar met several people there who invited him to parties in town. Some of them were also in the military, but one couple he became close to and who had invited him to their house, were transplanted New Yorkers who worked in interior decorating. The parties this couple had were likened in style to a New Orleans whorehouse. The clamp down on Gays in the army there, led one officer to ask my informant how he knew these men. To protect himself, he had his mother write him a letter, which he dictated, introducing him to them as being relatives.

Because it was already attracting a large Gay population, San Francisco could support a diverse array of bars. The Copper Lantern in North Beach, was among the first bars to have dancing for men. Another one was called the Levee--it had a long hall arranged so the bartender could see the entrance and if people were dancing and the door opened people stopped until it was determined that the person was ok. Similarly in New York there was a bar on the west side in the forties that had dancing. Greg went in there once wearing his black army shoes and socks.²⁵ The bartender made every one stop dancing and asked him if he

²⁵. Branson became very proficient at recognizing cops dressed as Gays. She even thought they were coached in the method, Gay Bar, p. 42.

were a cop because of the shoes. The bars in North Beach were much nicer than the ones in the Tenderloin. But on the whole the bars were very similar to one another--one was not more "trendy" than the other for the most part.

Bars could also be a blend of Gay and straight. In Abington, one of Philadelphia's suburbs, there was a bar that had two parts. The front part was straight but it was connected by a corridor to a back bar where Gay men could dance. The difficulty was that the only rest rooms were in the back part so straight people had to go through this Gay area to get to them. Since it was a misdemeanor for two people of the same sex to dance together or touch it was essential for there to be some signal to show outsiders were coming through. Typically, someone would whistle and then "everybody would have to quick jump and sit down on the sofas and chairs so this person would pass through and use the john and then everybody would go back" to dancing. It may have been called the Paddock and was commonly thought to have been a straight bar that was on hard times whose owners thought they could get a larger clientele by attracting Gays.

There was a level of decorum in the bars because owners did not want to lose their licenses. Men were not allowed to touch.²⁶ But sometimes they would put their hands on

²⁶. Though most men I interviewed supported this assertion, they sometimes contradicted themselves. Also see Cory, The Homosexual in America, p. 127.

somebody's knee or around the shoulders. Another technique for meeting or indicating interest was to press your knee against the knee of the person next to you.²⁷ Though this action was usually in places that were less explicitly Gay. Bars often required shirt and tie to get in or had a charge to get in. They would dress in coat and tie or "'high Brooks' as we called it."²⁸ The stereotyped man would wear grey flannels, or a grey suit ("there were only two shades of grey," white shirt, black silk, knit tie and cordovans. "It was kind of a uniform." In one person's view, wearing the uniform gave license to "misbehave like crazy" since the clothes were inarguably respectable and part of the establishment. Then there was "the fluffy sweater set"-- college students wearing sweaters and chinos.²⁹ Philadelphia's Maxine's was seen as being "piss elegant" with men wearing cuff links and handkerchiefs in the pockets of their jackets. Generally, there was not the semiotic diversity in clothing styles that there is today. Pinkie

²⁷. Vidal also notes this gesture, City and the Pillar, p. 181, p. 223.

²⁸. Brooks Brothers, the men's clothing manufacturer for the American establishment, must have played a large role among Gay men of the era who were becoming middle class. All of the middle class men I interviewed talked about their clothing being purchased there. One even referred to 4 B's: "Blown by Brooks Brother's Boys" as being a sought after fantasy.

²⁹. Stearn describes such a group. The Sixth Man, pp. 160-161 emphasizes the delicacy of these men. Later they would be seen as sensitive, rather than delicate, and their style would be taken over by straight men.

rings "were a dead giveaway" and "were suspect" that someone was Gay, even if in England, as many believed, they represented social class. Wearing more than one ring on one or both hands was also considered a sign someone was Gay. To some extent, wearing jewelry, such as a bracelet was a sign of "how Gay you were."³⁰ People would comment on cuff links that were too large: "my dear, too much."

There were individual blacks who became popular in the white bars but no large representation of them, though one man thought that there were more blacks in Gay bars than in straight ones. Some white people knew about Black bars. One man saw a black man come into a bar and befriended him because he could sense the tension. Some white men liked black bars and went to them regularly but they always went with a black person. Others went on an irregular basis. Still the same there were Gay bars in black neighborhoods in Philadelphia and New York. Some were also congregated among other bars in Center City, Philadelphia. There was enough diversity among Gay bars in the black Gay community to have elegant bars as well. When South Street, Philadelphia was a famous black entertainment area there was a bar called the Postal Card that attracted a dressy crowd. Some of the most famous bars in Harlem also attracted both white and black

³⁰. Vining, Gay Diary: 1954-1967 (New York: Pepys Press, 1981, p. 10) once misread the this code when he was cruising a young man on a bus in the midwest. He concluded that wearing a bracelet must mean something different there than it did in New York

Gays, largely because the quality of the entertainment was so high.

Some bars catered to professional, more mature people. Others felt that some bars were more fun and called them "trashy bars." There were places where "you could put your cards out on the table and if someone wanted to play them, you played them." If you were sexually charged you "did not want all this bantering back and forth which could become tiring...you wanted to get right to the point." This man remembers using the word "Gay" for the first time in Daytona about the time Perry Como's song "keep it gay" became popular.

One man heard about a bar in New York that was Gay called the Blue Parrot, which was part of what was called "the bird circuit"--a group of Gay bars that all had birds as part of their names.³¹ Another was called the Faison D'Or, or the Gold Pheasant. They were congregated in midtown

³¹. Stearn, The Sixth Man, p. 156. The notoriety of the bird circuit remains an open question but in the 1989 film "The Two Jakes" which takes place during the 1940's, the Gay bar depicted is called the "Green Parrot," which seems more than a coincidence to me. Robert Towne's screen play describes the scene as being "dark and deco, neon piping of mauve and green, deep booths lining the walls. A black piano player accompanies himself as he sings to a quiet, appreciative clientele." He notes that "chat and cigarette smoke come from couples who are all well-dressed, and all male." scenes 133 and 144. (emphasis in original). He also has the owner acknowledge that he makes payoffs to the police in order to make the bar "the best fuckin' business I got." Later in scene 139 the bar is raided, the cops "beating the shit out of everyone and everything" and one cop saying "Smile at the birdie, girls" in a room where there are no women.

on the east side. They were smoky and dark and packed with guys of all ages, but mostly younger men who were in their first years out of the service after World War II.

Even when bars were raided, Gays often brought the party atmosphere to the jail with them. When a particular bar was raided in Miami, the guys just continued to cruise in the jail. The man who told me about this raid said he even had sex there, with the guy he had connected with in the bar. Later, the bar owner bailed out everyone and threw a party for the men who were arrested. Such was the fear of raids that this bar was run more like a speak easy in that it was necessary to knock to get in and the door attendant had to clear a person before he was admitted. In Philadelphia bar patrons were usually taken to a police station close to 12th and Pine which was the station closest to where most of the bars were. Sometimes there were so many people crowded in, there was no room to sit. The party would continue. Somebody might sing the old song "She's only a bird in a gilded cage" or do a performance from the prison movie "I Want to Live."

"The desperate hour" was the last hour the bars were open. It was called desperate because it was the last chance to pick up somebody if that was why you had gone out that night. After the bars closed Philadelphia's cafeterias would become Gay. The Horn and Hardarts, Thompson's, Hamburger Heaven all would attract large numbers. Some of these places

were quite large, seating as many as 500. Other cities had similar hangouts for the late night after the bars closed.

There is no doubt that for most men, bars were the primary source of information about Gay life and entree into it. The history of Gay life must include them and the ways in which they were centers of acculturation, ones that every person I interviewed foregrounded as a source of information and socialization. But they were not the only source, and they were not alone in having their own code for behavior and creativity. Some other places and methods gave coherence to the lives of Gay men, as we shall see in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 6: CIRCLING RIVERS

"The circling rivers the breath, and breathing it in and out,
The beauty of the waist, and thence of the hips..."

--Walt Whitman, Leaves of Grass, "Children of Adam,"; "I Sing the Body Electric," 9:31-32

Bars were not the only institutions that Gays could rely on for making either sexual or social contacts. Often, they simply appropriated commercial establishments or public spaces that were logical for men to connect. This chapter describes some of the best known ones that allowed for success in this furtive time. I will also discuss some ways Gays communicated their Gayness through folklore and other creative means.

Many hotels, if not overtly Gay, were known to be Gay friendly allowing Gays to stay and not be harassed. In some instances it was possible to bring sexual partners back to your room, if you were discreet. One man's first night with his lover was spent in the Henry Hudson in New York after meeting at the Blue Parrot. They had to enter separately to avoid suspicion by the desk clerk. There were other hotels that allowed people to bring in one night stands, or that one could go to with a partner on the spur of the moment that were less concerned about their image.¹ These were

¹. It must have been difficult for two men to share a room together if Gore Vidal, The City and the Pillar Revised (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1965) is any indication. In one case, two men are expressly asked if they want a double room, as if there were other options (p. 56) and in another whether or not a double bed or two singles are required (p.

called "no questions, no luggage" hotels since most hotel clerks would be suspicious of two men arriving, late at night usually, without luggage. Typically, they attracted prostitutes as well. Several existed on Arch Street in Philadelphia. When motels began to be built there were some near Lincoln Drive that catered to this market. The key element was getting to a place that did not require seeing luggage either overtly or for reasons of social regulation.

But even if they were not explicitly Gay, hotels and their restaurants and bars were often places for people to meet one another as another point of entree into Gay life. In Wilmington, one man hooked up with a group of ten guys every Saturday or Sunday night for dinner and drinks. His introduction to them came from someone he worked with in the restaurant business. The bar had a part that was almost exclusively Gay and the rest of the patrons knew it. Since the bars stopped serving alcohol early, they would then go as a group to someone's home to continue the party.

The Astor Hotel bar in New York was all men and though not well known as a Gay place, its single sex policy, like that of the Oak Room at the Plaza and the bar at the Taft made it a natural place for Gays to meet. The Astor was especially notorious on this underground circuit. Perhaps the Astor was so famous because at least some cigarette girls were protective of their Gay clientele. They would

144). In both instances, the men are viewed suspiciously.

warn patrons of impending raids saying, sotto voce, "cigars, cigarettes, detectives."² Similarly, in the Bellevue-Stratford, in Philadelphia only men were allowed to sit at the bar so it became a source for making pick ups. The Taft evidently attracted people who stayed for the weekend. There, the back part of its enormous bar was predominantly Gay.³

The hotel as a location for cruising was a source for "the gentleman Gay." Often they attracted ostensibly straight businessmen who were looking for a less obviously Gay atmosphere. So, in New York, for example, businessmen would typically go to midtown hotels than to the bars in Greenwich Village.

Bus stations due to their attraction for transients and visitors were another prime location for single men to connect. One man I interviewed actually became a bus station manager and hired a Gay friend as an assistant. The friend had an apartment in center city so he could use it as a place to crash. It was common knowledge that you could use the Greyhound station in any city if you were new in town as a source of finding someone who could tell you where to find

². George Chauncey, Gay New York (New York: Basic Books, 1994), pp. 350-351.

³. Many bars must have had sections that attracted Gays in addition to straights. One other person mentioned a bar in Abington, PA that was similar in this respect. Another example of this phenomenon is a bar in Grand Rapids, MI described in Keith Vacha, Quiet Fire: Memoirs of Older Gay Men (Trumansburg, NY: Crossing Press, 1985), p. 202.

Gay bars and other Gay friendly establishments.

The same notoriety held true for train stations.

Restrooms there were very active for meeting people. At Thirtieth Street Station, Philadelphia, one man recalled seeing people hang around the men's room for half an hour or longer waiting to meet someone. Since the station also had a bowling alley in it at one time, that part also attracted Gay men. They would also use the area below and around the station at the track level to meet people.

The bus station manager went on to a management position at the Germantown YMCA. This was more of a residency hotel than a transient one typical of the Y's. The one downtown was more Gay and people would check in for the weekend if they were looking for sexual companionship.⁴ This was true of Y's everywhere in the country. My sources suggest this happened in Philadelphia, New York, New Orleans, Washington and Wilmington. They were a source of "unlimited opportunity." In some cases it was possible to drop into the rest rooms there to meet people. After all, "that's where you picked up your guy." The technique there was, as in other rest rooms, to show an erection at a urinal, pass a note under a toilet stall wall or tap one's foot. And like the bus stations, they were a certain source of local information. On a business trip to New Orleans, one

⁴. Donald Vining found the Philadelphia Y "much livelier than the one in Washington," A Gay Diary: 1954-1967 (New York: Pepys Press, 1981), p. 232.

man cruised the men's room at the "Y" to find out where the local bars were. People knew that certain floors were better than others. A crackdown occurred in some of them-- people were not allowed to keep the door to their rooms open. People left their doors open to hear if someone was in the men's room or the showers. People would grab their towels and run to the shower.⁵ It was very risky to try to bring someone back to the Y from a bar. The Y management usually required that everyone show a key to their room. People who worked out at the Y often would become a source for social contacts. At the Y in Washington, D.C. the sun deck was a place where many Gay men met to socialize but in the fifties it was very circumspect because of the then recent purges of homosexuals from the State Department.⁶

All of the baths were places for orgies. You went in and you were given a locker, or a room, and a towel. You would wander the halls with a towel around your middle or a short bathrobe. There were usually steam baths as well where sex took place but most people preferred taking someone back to their room if possible. The Everhard Baths in New York

⁵. Vining notes that Y's that lacked communal showers were a disappointment or frustrating, A Gay Diary: 1954-1967, p. 9, p. 21.

⁶. One man likened purging the State Department of homosexuals to ridding San Francisco of Gay waiters--"the place would be empty." He also quoted Gore Vidal (I have not sought a source for this quote) as saying that in those days if you were a State Department employee the climate was such that "when you bring a banana for lunch, you ate it like it was corn on the cob."

was known as the "blackfoot reservation" because the floors were so dirty. It was remembered as being quite dirty and quite large with five or six stories. The pool in the basement was also enormous but so dirty that most people would not swim in it. One man said the steam room was the size of his house. "I heard that some lovers got in trouble with their friend because they weren't careful with their dirty feet, they'd dirty their sheets." It was thought to have begun as a Jewish spritz.

The Turk street baths in San Francisco were much nicer. Clean and bright in contrast to the New York bath houses, "it was heaven." It was also famous with people visiting San Francisco and business men looking for midday or afternoon liaisons. Weekdays were always crowded at that time of day. Bathhouse culture included the reality that if all the lights went on you knew there was trouble with the police.

As time went on the baths became more grand, complete with Olympic size pools and entertainment. The floor shows in the night club area would also require that patrons wear a strap-on black tie with a little white collar in addition to the towel they had around their waists.

In Philadelphia, there were the Bellevue baths which were down an alley near the Bellevue Stratford Hotel, housed in a warehouse-like building. Patrons would ascend to the upper floors by elevator. Once there, they would, as in other bath houses, exchange their clothes for a towel. The

bathhouse proper was entered through a long corridor with photographs of the owner with famous movie and stage stars. Inside the floor plan was helix shaped--one room following another progressively getting smaller and darker. Beds lined the walls. Interestingly, a very popular weekend there was when the Army-Navy game was played. Evidently, it was a festive weekend in all Philadelphia, with many out of town visitors, and there would even be lines outside the baths for people waiting to get in. Another important point made by one man was that bathhouses were not all that common then, so the fact that Philadelphia had one made it attractive to out-of-towners.

Legitimate movie theaters were also locations for meeting people. These were nicknamed "gropaterias," the balcony especially. Some people preferred them because they were places where it was so easy to make contact sexually. The people who went were thought unlikely to go to other Gay places. They were often open all night so there was plenty of opportunity. Several large theaters on Market Street, Philadelphia were popular. Older men would go there wearing stereotypical rain coats and they were the vast majority. But even young people knew about them and went. One man became aware of them when he was twelve, attending frequently thereafter until he was old enough to go to bars. Conversation was not necessary; usually people just reached for each other after making eye contact. Of the movie

theaters in New York, it was said, "You could do anything in there." Usually that meant in the balcony or in the men's room.

The Trocadero in Philadelphia, too, was a theater. It was also a burlesque strip joint that Gay men would go to late on Sunday night and early Monday morning since closing rules for bars made it difficult to be out after midnight otherwise. There was a show one minute after midnight thus avoiding the Sunday blue laws. Gays found the entertainment fun even if it was second rate. The pump and grind girls were a good source of camp as were the singers who were uniformly awful.

Beaches, wherever large numbers of men congregated, became havens for Gays, even in Brazil and Vancouver where some of the men I interviewed lived. In Vancouver, one teen-aged man often went to the beach late at night seeking companionship. It was possible to go off to the bushes there and have sex. In Atlantic City, the beach near the Claridge Hotel was quite Gay. Bathing suits of the time were more like boxer shorts than the kind of briefs that are advertised today in catalogs that cater to a Gay clientele. People made friends there, couples met other couples. Pool side in many hotels that had even the smallest Gay population was a location of sociality.

On college campuses, employees often discovered that there were many bathrooms that served a social function. One

blatant sign that they were meeting places was the graffiti on the walls. When asked about his days as a university employee and the Gay life there one man responded, "Oh my God, I can tell you about the directors who was in the men's room all the time."⁷ He then went on to mention one particular individual who was said to be there so often that he had a "path worn" from his office to the men's room in the basement of the student union. Evidently his behavior was widely known and people, both straight and Gay, would kid him about it. But not all straight people approved of this kind of activity and some would refuse even to use such rest rooms.

Often people would meet there and go elsewhere, usually to the home of one or the other. A simple introduction was all that sufficed. It was possible to meet people in these college rest rooms even during the day, which would suggest that frequenters were taking risks with entrapment since there were more police around during the day typically. Usually the people who went to these rest rooms were not students. Some rest rooms were more active than others. One popular place was aided by the fact that the door squeaked which gave notice that someone was coming. Often it was possible to see the same people there again and again. And, of course, many of the same people were seen in the bars.

⁷. Director was the term then used for professional bureaucrats in this university.

But all men's rooms were potential venues for encountering others. "You went into them in the hope of seeing somebody" "Understood by the people who were looking for it, but not by the people who weren't" "You always go in there with the hope that something might happen," are typical comments about them.⁸

Another main way of seeing Gay life and getting access to it was to note the obviousness with which some people demonstrated they were Gay, even if it reduced someone to a stereotype. One classmate was deemed to be too blatantly Gay, as given away by the intonation of his speech and the fact that he did not participate in athletics. John hid from his family the fact that he studied theater as a major because he was afraid of the stigma.

One guy while in the military would actually go to Gay bars every weekend and had a reputation as a "cocksman" among his battalion because they thought he was chasing girls. He deliberately worked at not appearing Gay and let them believe he was, in fact, chasing girls. One man double-dated women with another man, though both were Gay, "never a pin was dropped." My informant found out later that the

⁸. Vining who ordinarily did not cruise men's rooms treats the practice matter-of-factly, A Gay Diary: 1954-1967, p. 22. Even an elite person such as Glenway Wescott seems to think that all restrooms are cruising locations and not particularly special, Continual Lessons: the Journals of Glenway Wescott, 1937-1955 (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1990), p. 105. On the other hand, bar owner Helen Branson wanted no part of tea room cruising in her bar, Gay Bar (San Francisco: Pan-Graphic Press, 1957), pp. 76-77.

other man was Gay since he was living with an attractive man.

In New York, the fact that you had to move the car to avoid parking tickets was a good excuse for getting out of the house and cruising the streets. One man would leave his wife nearly every night for this activity and as a way of making time to go to bars.

An important sign of being gay was to have decorated your dwelling in a manner that could be a little too flamboyant with lace doilies, say, or a multicolor kitchen. Gays were thought by other Gays to have a desire to make even a humble place look elegant, "aggressively tasteful." Those who had more money would decorate gracefully and have their homes professionally decorated, often by people they knew socially. One man remembered "display faggot trickery." When asked what that meant, he recalled lamp shades that were too ornate and overdone and light levels dim by the standards of the time. Rather than have the usual three piece living room sets typical of the time, Gay people would do more mixing and matching in their living rooms, dining rooms or bedrooms. Another popular feature in decorating was to have bottles with different colored water in them in the window or on a sideboard, sometimes as many as ten different bottles. Paintings of males would be on the wall, sketches, reproductions of Michelangelo's paintings or prints, pictures of Michelangelo's David or three-

dimensional reproductions of the statue itself are typical examples. Often harlequins or other cartoonish pictures of men in tight pants "showing a basket." Sometimes this was called "swish" decor.⁹ One characteristic generally was to have pictures of men on the walls, either photographs or famous paintings of men. It was considered significant that not only would such a man know about the arts but also favor portrayals of men.

Often dress styles could be a giveaway that someone was Gay. One man as a teenager recognized that Rittenhouse Square was a Gay spot by the dress and hair styles of the men there. They often had bleached blond hair done up in a "duck's ass" manner, which was a kind of sweeping back of the hair to the back. One of the men I interviewed from the West recalls a man, a milliner, who looked just like that and his "wondy" lover--wondy meaning tall, thin and "waving in the wind." A really flamboyant person might wear a gold lamé ascot and what was called a Xavier Cougat coat, which was like a double-breasted jacket with a belt. The style was to tie the belt so tight that the bottom part stuck out.

⁹. Branson, Gay Bar, pp. 35-36, describes the home of one man who went to her bar often. She went to the man's home for a party and in spite of the fact that the building was quite old, she "was astonished at the miracle my [her] host had wrought. His color scheme was black and white. The walls were white and many pieces of furniture black. Flowers and pictures in color stood out against this background." Branson especially admired that the decoration was done without much cost and was indicative of how Gays "are not hampered by convention in their thinking and this freedom spills over into many fields."

Often men who dressed this way would also paint their finger nails with clear polish. But even if the style was not quite so obvious, men would wear white or pastel colors, such as light blue, which were not almost never worn by straight men. When Brooks Brothers came out with a pink shirt it immediately became popular with Gay men in one group.¹⁰

Another kind of obviousness was taking on affected speech patterns seen to be Gay. It was seen to be rooted in copying the voice of one's mother. One man said he had a friend whose intonation pattern and body language were so much like his mother's, in fact, that the two were indistinguishable.¹¹

The way you communicated the seriousness of your relationships was another means of indicating you were Gay. If you were romantically attached to someone you referred to the person as your "friend" or "roommate." Although the terms were ambiguous people knew what was meant because usually, they referred to someone you lived with. Among

¹⁰. Though there have been many changes in the intervening years, the ways Gays dress has been among the greatest. Vining speaks of how common bleached hair was, A Gay Diary: 1946-1954 (New York: Pepys Press, 1980), p. 238 and the fact that tight pants were almost always an indication that someone was Gay, A Gay Diary: 1954-1967, p. 2.

¹¹. Branson felt that Gays were extraordinarily devoted to their mothers. As evidence for this trait, she notes that many of them brought their mothers with them to her bar, Gay Bar, p. 73.

other Gay people, the term "husband" might be employed.¹²

Another slang term, popular especially in theatrical circles, was "white marriage." This referred to a Gay man married to a lesbian woman: a "marriage of convenience."¹³

People were so uptight about straight people finding out, they went to extraordinary lengths to cover up their sleeping arrangements. One man shared a two-bedroom apartment with his friend but when some straight friends came over he would try to make it appear that both beds had been slept in, though the couple only used one bed. Once, a straight friend made up the messed-up bed first thinking he was helping out his Gay friend, then the host went back and messed up the already-made bed, which had not been slept in. Another couple had two twin beds in the room they shared on the order of a heterosexually married couple as portrayed in fifties television. This stratagem was employed, though the couple had lived together for over thirty years.

If Gays felt it necessary to go to extraordinary, special locations to meet one another or develop elaborate means of subterfuge to signal one's Gayness, they had a great source of comfort and comradery in parties, and festive occasions.

¹². Sometimes "husband" was used in a campy way, Vining, A Gay Diary: 1946-1954, p. 239. Branson found the term roommate to be the most common, Gay Bar, p. 59.

¹³. Vidal notes the use of the term "beard" to describe women married to Gay men, City and the Pillar, p. 85.

"Gay life was always big parties because you couldn't go out." Any excuse was made for a party, it was said-- "people's birthdays, the Fourth of July, whatever."

Halloween, importantly, was always an occasion for a party. One prominent Delawarean liked especially to dress in drag then and have his entrance announced as he came down the grand staircase in his mansion. Often his mother would be with him. This particular annual Halloween party had a drag contest associated with it, year after year. Prizes of liquor or cigarettes would be given by preselected judges for the funniest and most elite costumes. They would also have shows with drag singing of Andrew's Sisters songs.

Halloween seems to be the only time people were allowed to be publicly flamboyant as Gays. A Halloween parade on Locust Street from Broad to 12th streets was famous for many years in Philadelphia.¹⁴ The location was a natural since there were many bars there including the Pirate Ship, which was the focal point of the crowd. The streets were crowded with onlookers of all types who cheered and screamed at the "promenaders" as they were called. So many would come it was necessary to put up barriers. It gave men the chance to dress as women. "Halloween was Halloween. It's not Gay pride day," one man said. Later in the conversation he explained that he did not approve of Gay pride parades and thought the

¹⁴. Detroit, too, had a Gay Halloween parade and the word "promenaders" was used there as well, Vacha, Quiet Fire, p. 28.

old way of celebrating Halloween was better. The parade was also widely known among straight people. One black man remembers being taken to it as a teenager with his father. And even though his father made fun of these "faggot punks" they both enjoyed the parade and had a good time.

But even if people did not attend the parade, Halloween was an occasion for dressing up and gender reversals. Lesbians might dress in tuxedos or a mixed sex couple would wear the clothing of the opposite sex. Others would just choose ordinary kinds of costumes like Ma and Pa Kettle or bull fighters.¹⁵

New Years was primarily a time for parties in bars or at home. The police would usually be more lenient then. Christmas was time to have friends over or even share it with Gay friends and one's family.

As indicated in the last chapter, in the advice given by the older teacher to his pupil there were places to go on vacation holiday if you were Gay. Algonquin, Maine, Provincetown, Fire Island, Miami, Key West, and New Hope were places for Gay people to go.¹⁶ Atlantic City had as many as fifteen Gay bars at one point. Few people stayed on

¹⁵. Donald Webster Cory also found Thanksgiving to be an occasion for a drag ball in "one of the larger cities in the United States," The Homosexual in America: a Subjective Approach (New York: Greenberg, 1951), pp. 129-130.

¹⁶. In The Sixth Man (New York: Doubleday, 1961), Jess Stearn describes the scene in some of these resorts, p. 56-57, p. 70. On Fire Island men had camp nicknames for their homes.

in Atlantic City after Labor Day, however, unless they were interested in the Miss America Pageant. "There were some Gay people that just knew every name of every Miss America that ever won a crown. And they would take notes, they would have themselves a ball that weekend trying to pick the winner." Louise, of the famous bar of the same name, turned the night of the Miss America pageant into a party providing campy commentary for the proceedings.

Sometimes it was possible to fall in with a group of men who structured their social, party and holiday life together. One man made friends with someone at Maxine's, and was invited to join a group of guys who got together regularly. It met every other week for a long time but now that the group is older they meet every third week. This was a small group of about fifteen men. It was informally named "stitch and bitch." They still have independent lives with lovers, their own homes and so on, but get together for dinner and work on homey projects such as painting or needle point. To join you had to be elected in. "And we would bitch. You'd better not leave the room because we'd bitch you up one way and down the other one." It was done in fun. The group became very close and often partied together. "If I was having a party I didn't have to invite them [it was] just say when." This group was thought of with deep affection by the participant I spoke with since "it is awfully hard to get a group of Gay men together without

fighting or making a pass at each other." Business meetings took place now and then. Dues were collected to hold parties every season. A president was elected, largely to be sure that the treasurer did not run away with the money.

A group that was very different in atmosphere from that of the "stitch and bitch" group was one that met regularly for dinner in San Francisco. It was made up of Gay married men and their wives. This group of men all knew each other were Gay but believed the wives did not know it. If the wives knew about their husbands it was not known to the men. It was also considered something to empathize about. This group of seven couples got together regularly for dinner at each others homes. The husbands would go off after dinner by themselves and sometimes even meet for dinner separately from the wives. On these occasions, they "would fuck their brains out."

Usually a strict sense of appropriate behavior ruled at parties. First, only trusted people were invited. People's reputations mattered and if a new person was introduced or brought to a party there was a contingent acceptance. Drag did not matter so much as did drunkenness and carelessness with other people's belongings. For instance, if someone burned the furniture with a cigarette that person would not just be excluded from future parties of that particular host but would also probably fall out with an entire group of people.

They sometimes had a bar atmosphere and even entertainment. Men would congregate and drink scotch with water or soda. Another popular drink was a zombie. It came in a tall glass and made of several different kinds of whiskey. People also drank "seven and sevens" made from Seagrams whiskey and 7-up if they did not have much money. Many men felt they were just like other cocktail parties of the era except it was just men standing around "dishin' people." Occasionally though, they were more outlandish. At one in particular, "everyone acted like they were Oscar Wilde," passing witticisms with one another. Many Gay parties were only men and just as Gay bars were distinguished by this fact, so were Gay parties.

Some found that once they got on the circuit of parties, they looked forward to them. Eventually they got bored with drinking, small talk and thick smoke, and began having small groups to their own home.

Because in many places the bars closed at midnight, afterhours parties were common in people's homes. One tried hard to be invited to these. These provided better occasions to meet people for sexual interests. They were not especially debauched but rather subdued with candle light, incense, even in the fifties. No one did anything sexual in public but they did make contacts. Sometimes women would be invited, which provided a sense of inhibition to keep the men in check from being overtly sexual, if the host was

particularly concerned about being raided or otherwise felt the need to be low key. Remember, the era was such that even parties were not exempt from potential police raids and many were raided. Sometimes they would arrest people, but other times they would just come in to shake up people on the pretext of the host supposedly running a disorderly house because men were dancing together.

Dinner parties were held by younger Gays if their parents were away. If someone was on their own these parties became much more raucous. There would be "a lot of drinking, a lot of joking." They were also occasions to get to meet other people. Sometimes people would be invited on a kind of trial basis to see if they would fit in with a particular group. Often they were pot lucks or buffets where people would bring different dishes. When people were financially strapped they would make tuna casserole, commonly called "fairy pudding." People took responsibility for have parties on the various holidays. Typically, it was understood, for instance, one person in the circle would have the Memorial Day party, and another the one on Labor Day.

Networks were established through parties. They were occasions for sharing information on where to meet people. One man remembered that topic being the focus of conversation. Often if people lived near bars or a cluster of bars, as in New Hope, they would volunteer to be the host for parties. One couple there had a very large house and

would throw parties three or four times a year for more than fifty people. Men of all ages would attend. These would begin with a long cocktail party at about 8:00 p.m. lasting two or three hours. Dinner would follow sometimes as late as midnight. The house was full of antiques, but for parties it was decorated with crepe paper, lots of flowers and signs with silly sayings such as "this is a gay house so lets all be happy" would be posted on the walls. Some guests would stay over night and getting up late the next morning drink bloody marys.¹⁷

At some parties, they would be dancing to popular music of the time. Peggy Lee and Mary Martin were popular as were show tunes. Sometimes people would sing along with the records, especially with show tunes.¹⁸

Nicknames displayed creativity and gave a sense of fun and belonging. Sometimes people became tagged with a nickname and it stuck. One example was a man named Lola who remained Lola for forty years among his friends. Another was called Wilma. "It was just a way of being camp." Most thought it was a way of being funny that straights would not

¹⁷. Vidal describes two similar parties in The City and the Pillar, pp. 75-78, pp. 172-178. Since there were no video cameras or tape recorders at these parties, novels will have to do as a source for small talk at parties.

¹⁸. Donald Webster Cory and John P. LeRoy recall many parties where "Gypsy" was the focus of the singing and play acting after that musical appeared, The Homosexual and His Society: a View from Within (New York: The Citadel Press, 1963), p. 69.

understand or find amusing in the fifties. "Isn't he a camp?," people said. Some felt that using women's names this way was both a reflection of self-hatred and demeaning to women, others thought "it was good fun; we were just camping it up." Evidently, there was a bit of class awareness in this practice since one man felt it was "second class."¹⁹

Using women's names could also be a strategy for protecting the fact that one was gay. Men would refer to the Gay friends when talking to straight people by women's names. Sometimes they would even refer to them by a gendered word such as sister as in "I am going to have lunch with my sisters." This sort of reference was also used among Gays for other Gays as well. People often gave fake names in bars. One guy made one up and called himself Bob Kellogg. On occasion, men would not tell other men their real names for months, even after they had become friends. In one circle of friends, the men would use their mother's names kiddingly, often in diminutive form, when referring to one another. Josephine became Joe or Josie.

Sometimes this was called "fem talk" but even masculine men had nicknames. One masseur was named "Mildred." Even in the navy, groups of gay men had nicknames that were women's names. One man remembered a whole barracks full. Often a

¹⁹. There must have been contrasting Gay nicknames with a masculine flavor but I did not hear of any. James Barr's aggressively manly novel, Quatrefoil (1950) (Boston: Alyson, 1980) includes a character named "Stuff."

man's name was feminized. So one person named Charles became Carlotta, George Georgette, Albert Alberta.²⁰

And of course there was Mary.²¹ In one group people called each other Mary Duggan, after the comic book character. Other groups called each other Dorothy, reminiscent of the famous question "do you know Dorothy?" In one of the joint interviews I did, one man who was nicknamed Dorothy was asked by the other man there, whom he had known for over thirty years, if he were the original Dorothy!

It was necessary often to use coded words to cover the fact that you were Gay. These terms became a kind of nickname for being Gay. One group of friends used the term "bazoo" to refer to being Gay as in "is he a bazoo?" or "does he run with the bazoos?" Another usage was to refer to

²⁰. Cory gives other examples, The Homosexual in America, p. 123: "Nothing that these people do stamps them as being apart from the others so much as their conversational use of she for he, her for him, in the most matter-of-fact manner. And yet, after a few hours with groups of this sort, there is hardly a homosexual unable to say Joan for Joe, Roberta for Robert." Stearn also records a police officer saying that homosexuals commonly used feminine names for each other, especially if they lived together. This particular inspector thought "Mabel and Flo are common names for the passive type," The Sixth Man, p. 147.

²¹. Mary is still used for camp effect. One clothing and slogan button manufacturer announces his arrival on his catalog cover "Mary... the New Don Kaufman Graphics catalog has arrived!" Another camp use is the parish administrator who wanted to name the parish newsletter, "Hail, Mary!" after the name of the church's patron. Yet others found the use of Mary and other campy names difficult to handle. See Vacha, Quiet Fire, p. 32 where an older man says he does not "go for that sort of shit...It shows so little discretion."

someone as being "bazoogle." Another boundary term in this group was "neche a nous." It was meant to be a paraphrase of the French expression "ne chez nous" meaning "not of our house" but in this particular group it became slurred to "neche a nous." It could also be used to indicate whether or not some other Gay person might be safe to pick up in a bar or elsewhere.²²

One Gay couple had nicknames for one another that were a source of bonding and affection for each other. These were totally unrelated to their given names: beenie, abu, childy

One great opportunity for a party came when two men decided to get married. It is difficult to know how typical the following remembrance is but there are other examples from weddings of the period.²³

But,
talking about folklore, [laughs]
if you ever want to know about a folklore story,
the one time I went
they're all dead so
I can use their names
Phil Leno's wedding
there was this guy named Phil Leno and a guy
was a bar tender, tough,

²². Another term was "chi chi." See Vacha, Quiet Fire, p. 189.

²³. See Andrea Weiss and Great Schiller, Before Stonewall: the Making of a Gay and Lesbian Community (Tallahassee, FL: Naiad Press, 1988), p. 52. Others are reported in Lesbian and Gay Marriage: Public Commitments, Public Ceremonies ed. by Suzanne Sherman (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992). Also see John Boswell's monumental, if controversial, Same-Sex Unions in Premodern Europe (New York: Villard Books, 1994). Please note: interjections by me in this narrative are indicated by my initials DA.

straight, you know
 acting, you know punchin' people out,
 his name was Wally Esterly
 and they decided to get married
 this was before any of this activist,
 you know,
 thing about, ah,
 life time partners
 or you know all of this stuff thats going on now where
 people wanta, you know, so you can have
 insurance
 benefits, and you can have health insurance, ah,
 benefits, you know, if they would legalize gay
 marriages,
 you know there a lot of advantageous things that would
 happen but
 this was way back and this guy had a huge, enormous
 house
 and they had this big wedding
 and it was absolutely demented, they put out these, ah,
 invitations and it was, ah,
 Mr. and Mrs. Leno, you know, invite you to the wedding
 of their daughter [laughs]
 DA: they printed them?
 They printed them,
 the real mother and father and
 ah, this is how zany the forties was, you know,
 it was all cloistered,
 but very, it was a lot of comradery, a lot of fun.
 So everybody, we went and
 it was all done, you know,
 the place was done beautifully,
 they had wedding gifts.
 And I think like a hundred people,
 you know
 and they had a trellis
 with all these flowers and roses
 like, you know, some florist had, you know, made it,
 stapled them all to it
 and there was a real ordained minister, you know,
 who would have been shot by the by the ministry,
 or you know, the officials would have killed him on the
 spot
 but he was going to do it under this thing
 and they had a new television and all these gifts and
 everything
 Well anyway, they had a little Hammond organ
 that somebody brought
 and they were playing "here comes the bride" on the
 organ
 and down the steps comes this guy with four bridesmaids
 all in drag.

His real mother and father were there
 but they had a mother, you know, like an older Gay man
 and he had like, you know, blue velvet,
 with the points that came down to the hands with six
 buttons, and the wrists
 and had a long chiffon handkerchief and one of those
 big starched veiled hats
 what's it called "twal" or "qual"
 you know that you can see through,
 you know just like a matronly mother,
 you know, to give the bride away
 and then they,
 the real father you know
 was going to give the bride away.
 So anyway it started and they were
 playing the music
 and the lover, the ex-lover of the one,
 ah, getting married comes in,
 and ah, as they're coming down the steps you know with
 this,
 oh God, they had
 there were even children,
 you know, there was a child there
 with a nosegay and a pillow,
 like a nephew or something
 DA: where was this?
 It was demented
 And there were a lot of straight people, too.
 You know, a lot of relatives
 And this wedding was like at sixteenth, no
 it was at seventeenth, ah, seventeenth and Pine.
 The house is still there.
 So, ah,
 and there coming down
 The only thing it really proved was
 that
 all brides are not beautiful. [laughs]
 Anyway, this fight broke out,
 they said
 you know, "speak now or forever hold your peace"
 or whatever
 and ah,
 the ex-lover comes in
 and punches the groom in the mouth
 DA: did the person who was the bride dress as a women?
 Yes,
 in a complete full,
 you know,
 I mean a big long veil
 and the men who were the bridesmaids were wearing
 bridesmaid's outfits
 all matching,

you know, all men

DA: what color?

Well they were either pink or lavender, I mean like, who knows what.

So anyway

He punches the guy, they punch the guy, he goes, his elbow goes through the television screen and a big fight breaks out and the the ex-boyfriend of the bride goes up and took the top of the dress and ripped it all the way down,

half way down

and the guy was in a brassier stuffed with something and had a pair of like a pair of red polka dot boxer shorts.

And [laughing]

all the bridesmaids were screaming, and the real, the real father punched this guy and they started fighting, and everybody started fighting and the minister climbs out on the balcony and he's trying to get down the, down the

fire escape, you know, because he knew the police were coming, this trellis was like sort of wavering, and the trellis fell on the congregation and everybody was screaming and running out and climbing out of windows.

It was

bedlam,

you know, absolute bedlam, and you know,

ah, we got out, this friend and I,

we got down the fire escape and got out.

Of course, the cops came and you know arrested all the drags.

It was just incredible.

But I mean, ah,

that kind of fun, I mean,

I do[n't], coul[dn't], shouldn't call it fun,

it was fun because I escaped

It wasn't fun for the people who got locked up

but I mean that kind of zany stuff that you know you its like

it like out of out of a Eudora Welty novel or you know Saroyan would have written or somebody.

You know that kind of thing.

Tennessee Williams when he was writing humor.

And there were no drugs

and I don't think that kind of fun, funny kind of

ah

you can see the humorous aspects of it.

He concluded his story by reminding me of the fact that although there was a lot of fun to be had during this era, there was a "sinister" aspect as well. There was always the threat of the police, losing your job and the pressure of being under constant surveillance and potential violence.

Though this wedding narrative reveals a more elaborate culture and community than might be suggested by bars, parties, bathhouses and cruising techniques, all are interwoven in the lives of these men.²⁴ What emerges is that strong need to find one another, mentioned first in this chapter. It emerges through using the cultural resources of the period in exceedingly clever ways to produce a system that was simultaneously public and private, creating novel means for hiddenness to walk the fine line to the border of openness. The next chapter looks at how these same behaviors and creative acts suggest both continuity with and disjuncture toward and with the present.

²⁴. Though this is an extraordinarily funny story, it certainly was not the only Gay wedding of the era. Published accounts include Branson, Gay Bar, p. 59; Stearn, The Sixth Man, p. 215-217; Cory and LeRoy, The Homosexual and His Society, p. 11; Vacha, Quiet Fire, p. 180. Stearn's account is the fullest and describes a New York wedding attended by over one hundred people. It was similar to the one described here in that engraved invitations were sent and in its formality (not quite kept in the Philadelphia case!).

CHAPTER 7: THE RING IS CIRCLED, THE JOURNEY IS DONE

"The sign is reversing, the orb is enclosed,
 The ring is circled, the journey is done,
 The box-lid is but perceptibly open'd, nevertheless the
 perfume pours copiously out of the whole box."
 --Walt Whitman, Leaves of Grass, "A Broadway Pageant," 3:5-7

It is common among older people to refer to the past as the "old days." Labeling them as such suggests that differences between the past and the present are greater than similarities. By foregrounding a perspective of "that was then, this now" it is easy to lose sight of the remarkable continuity that exists among Gay men in folklore and the personal and social issues that confront them. Older Gay men and lesbians raise these questions naturally, as they watch succeeding generations replace them. Even in the era I examined, there were people who wondered about these issues. The October 1957 Mattachine Newsletter notes the potential for intergenerational differences:

Each generation of homophiles appararently [sic] has its own patterns. There seems to be a certain amount of evidence to suggest that the presentday [sic] homophile is tending to cultivate less extreme mannerisms, particlly [sic] it is suggested because the greater amount of scientific knowledge of homosexuality helps him to keep from believing he is completely unique and alone in the world.

Clearly, the Mattachines were interested in political respectability. Otherwise, who would care about extreme mannerisms (how extreme?, how cultivated?). This quotation does show, however, historical interest by these activists. The first sentence quoted recognizes discontinuities. The

next sentence in the newsletter, after the quotation is, "where did so much of the argot¹ and the terms used come from?," suggests a folklorist's consciousness and a sense of connectedness to the past.

One folklore example, first. "Dorothy" has been noted as a slang term for being part of the Gay community. Forty years ago the question, "does he [you] know Dorothy?" served to be a great boundary marker. Today, it is primarily used for its camp value and though most straights still would not have any idea what was meant by the question, Gays employ it not for reasons of both secrecy and bonding, but of bonding almost exclusively. Though today, in contrast, there is a generalized term for recognizing one another, "gaydar," Dorothy still resonates.¹ Two examples from popular culture are suggestive: a syndicated sex advice columnist responds to a Gay man who has a crush on another man whose sexual orientation seems ambiguous--"Ask Isadora" notes the "polite subterfuge" of "Are you a friend of Dorothy's?"; a 1995 film made up of three coming out stories includes one titled "A Friend of Dorothy."²

¹. Gaydar, today, is considered a skill. People are said to have good gaydar if they are able to recognize Gays. I suppose a straight person might have the ability but I have never heard of a straight person having "good gaydar." To blend the old and the new one might say someone with good gaydar can "pick out the friends of Dorothy."

². Isadora Alman, "Ask Isadora," Philadelphia City Paper, May 12-May 19, 1995, p. 30. Another, academic indication, of the resonance of Dorothy as a folk image is in the editors' introduction to Out in Culture: Gay, Lesbian

The more important shifts in the motives in folklore behavior revolve around issues of the closet and masculinity. These two issues, likewise, reveal both continuity and disjuncture, coherence and incoherence. The other realm that of necessity must be addressed is AIDS because its presence has been felt among all the men I spoke with, and all commented on how it has affected how they view their pasts.

"Everybody that we knew was, was [sic] totally closeted," one man said. "They knew each other, they knew a few other people but everybody was totally closeted." The meaning of the closet and how one coped with it individually and in groups is the best indicator of the shape of boundaries for Gay life. In the minds of these men "coming out" is contrasted with being "in the closet." But both terms shift and are molded over time and context. Yet if the closet was total, as the quotation suggests, how could anyone have connected?

Knowing Dorothy reveals the importance of folklore in this construction of social relations. To know what that

and Queer Essays on Popular Culture edited by Corey K. Creekmur and Alexander Doty (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), p. 3 where they briefly analyze "The Wizard of Oz" in ways that "friends of Dorothy" would. Perhaps I am wrong in my assumption that straight people do not understand the reference to Dorothy. If the New Yorker could publish an article about a black women who was fond of Gay white men titled "Friends of Dorothy" (the title also was a reference to her given name) maybe more people know it than I am allowing (see the article by Hilton Als, April 24, 1995).

expression means is to be admitted to group knowledge. For some, merely knowing the expression and employing its use was a signal for being out of the closet. To these men, the sense of coming out was participating in Gay life on even the most superficial level. The contrast was made with men who frequented the movie theaters, rest rooms or bathhouses on a clandestine basis. They were seen as being in the closet.

The use of double entendre in its multifarious forms (there are not only two interpretations with double entendre, there may be dozens) and its employment as a boundary marker, and indicator of group membership is key among Gays. As the use of Dorothy shows, the multivocality of double entendre over time increases if one specific term is found useful. The word queer also indicates these characteristics as I will show shortly.

A small example of how camp and double entendre blend, comes in the form of two expressions set apart by forty years, that nonetheless are cognates. Today, the expression is "go girl" or "you go, girl." Then, people said, "getch you" or "get her."³ As cognates they both are means of saying extraordinary behavior is taking place. Both can be used to suggest flamboyance. The difference is that older

³. Today's expressions can be found on advertisements on buses, or heard in the street. Several men I spoke to suggested the others from the fifties. It is also documented in Keith Vacha, Quiet Fire: Memoirs of Older Gay Men (Trumansburg, NY: The Crossing Press, 1985), p. 174.

expression has the additional contextual meaning of occasionally being a put down in the sense that someone was being perhaps more grand than was his station. Another difference is contextually revealed in the fact that the more recent interjection is used in popular culture orally as well as advertisements and t-shirts, for example.⁴ In the past they were deliberately used only in in-group contexts.

The bars serve as another important marker, albeit a physical rather than verbal one. Many men considered the coming out to be coincident with the time they first frequented Gay bars. And their importance has been noted in Chapter 5 and elsewhere. Sometimes the boundary was remarked upon with astonishment: "I am amazed to this day how they kept straight people out of these Gay bars. Well, a lot of them had door men who would say 'I don't think you'd like this bar' 'this is male bar' or something like that."

The bars themselves have remained almost the same according to one man. "The bars haven't changed that much, except for the music." His comment, based on over forty years of observing Gay bars is interesting because it

⁴. The interrelationship between Gay culture and the straight world needs more exploration. Two foundational works are Dennis Altman, The Homosexualization of America, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1982) and Michael Bronski, Culture Clash: the Making of a Gay Sensibility (Boston: South End Press, 1984). A relevant example here occurred when the famous drag star RuPaul encountered a gang of street kids. Thinking she was going to be attacked, she instead was relieved when they shouted, "Hey man it's RuPaul! Go girl." Charles Busch, "The New Feminine Mystique," New York (July 17, 1995), p. 26.

suggests continuity. On the other hand when I consider the bars of the forties and fifties as they were described to me I certainly hear the differences. Remember, there was little or no touching in them, as opposed to today when it is possible for Gay men to show affection publicly even in the streets, at least in Gay neighborhoods or cities with large Gay populations. The men wore more or less the same kind of clothing so there was the appearance of conformity. Black and white bars were almost completely separate and this separation was underpinned by a social racism considered repugnant to most people today.⁵ The age of the men who went to the bars was another shared characteristic. Then, as now, they are the turf of younger men primarily.

The decor was also considerably different. Many, if not most, of the bars of the earlier era were unmarked.⁶ It was necessary to know the exact street address, or finding most of them was hopeless. One man commented on the fact that today there are bars where it was possible to see out the windows, most of them having been painted over in his youth. To be sure, they are still quite smoky and dark but many men noted how much less dreary they seem. The decor is also much

⁵. It is with some sadness that I must point out that some Gay bars still attempt to keep African-Americans out by requiring elaborate forms of identification from them. A popular dance bar in Philadelphia was picketed for this ugliness in the late 1980's.

⁶. Helen P. Branson, Gay Bar (San Francisco: Pan-Graphic Press, 1957), p. 25.

more of a giveaway of the fact that the establishment caters to a Gay clientele. Many bars have blatant representations of homosexuality on the wall in the form of erotic pictures, or honors won in Gay softball leagues and other kinds of community competition.

The bar culture sometimes was thought to be more stimulating then than now, in the sense of "doing something clandestinely and in the underground world that was not commonly known, suspected perhaps, but not commonly known." This underground life was in parallel to "my community, my employment, my relatives. I would never admit to being homosexual to any of those separate groups or individuals. It was all play acting primarily. But I did get away with it. Today there is more of the 'I'm Gay, what the hell, here it is.'" This man went on to say that Gay pride parades are offensive to him. Clearly, he liked the sense of belonging that came with being part of the Gay world. On the other hand, he was certain that he did not want to become politically or publicly involved. In what sense was he in the closet? He did not think of himself as being there; he had an underground world he belonged to. For him the metaphor shifts from being in the closet, to coming out into a room--a room that is full of life and choices he did not otherwise know he had. For him, then, the act of taking a Gay identity, being a member of the Gay community, was mostly a social act.

His perception was different from the man who said "There was no sense of community; there was no community." This person, who had been attached to another man for all of his adult life, had a circle of Gay friends, and participated in the institutions that existed during the fifties, did not think he came out until he was in his mid-adulthood. He attended some self-help organizations for Gay men at that point and he calls it the crossroad when he "officially came out." For him coming out was more a question of psychic self-acceptance than participation in the Gay world. Still, it was with a sense of disappointment that he told me, "Many of the people I knew then are still very closeted."

They were also concerned with changes in the usage of the word "queer," and found it difficult to hear or understand, much in the same way the one man finds Gay parades repugnant. In the New York parade commemorating the Stonewall riots, for example, another sees the guys who are flamboyant in leather as queer not the other more mainstream looking types.⁷ "There is always that element of any society you don't want to be part of." This usage contrasts completely in motivation with that of many contemporary activists who employ it as a token of survival in the same

⁷. On the notion of mainstream and its contrasting opposites see Stephen-Paul Martin, "Bashing the Mainstream," Central Park, no. 24(Spring 1995), pp. 8-16, 66-72, 148-155, 267-274.

way the pink triangle is employed to represent the survival of Gays in the Nazi concentration camps. Curiously, this same man said of his life in the fifties "You weren't afraid of being called a queer because the people you traveled with always understood it. They were always the higher class." What I suppose he was suggesting is the more sophisticated people were more tolerant even if they used a term that in other contexts might be considered denigrating. John's observation reveals more about his perception of the class system than I think exists in reality. Though it may be true that certain manifestations of homophobia are unacceptable among educated and elite people, homophobia is still present. It is also true that working class people often accommodate Gays in their own particular ways making obscure the distinction he made.

For most of these older men "queer" reeks of the hostility of the earlier era. Another found queer to be a word that terrorized people. He found it offensive because it came from heterosexuals (he called "breeders") and was used as a put down. "It shook you to your toes." He finds that contemporary use of the term to serve as a reverse source of pride indicating survival, difficult to understand and wonders if someone would want to refer to one's lover as the "queer I live with."

Generally there was a sense of resignation, I think, for the prospects of the ability of Gays to change societal

attitudes toward them. The attitude toward the world was one that suggested it is better to live with the situation you face than risk too much by trying to change the circumstances of the world. "The militant Gay cannot erase the hostility" toward Gays among "the general population," was a common conclusion.

The usages of the word queer and the meanings that emerge in its contextual use, as I indicated earlier, serve as a complement to knowing Dorothy. Queer suggests overt power relations in setting group boundaries. In the fifties it was a bold declaration from straight people to Gay men to keep their marginal, deviant place in the social order. Today's usage is more variable and though it disturbs many older Gay men, it is employed by many younger Gays to say "do not mess with me, my rights or my body."⁸ For older Gays, the word queer is too loaded with past associations to have any positive usage. Dorothy sets the boundary in a different way. Once used as a code word for entrance into the Gay group it is now on the verge of being coded as an almost hip, pop culture reference to knowing what Gay life is about in a fun, playful way.

⁸. A key document of the grass roots movement to redefine queer was handed out as a broadside at the Gay pride parade in New York in June 1990 and reprinted: see Anonymous Queers, "Queers Read This," pp. 45-47 in William B. Rubenstein, Lesbians, Gay Men and the Law (New York: The New Press, 1993).

Dorothy and other code words, with their shifting meanings, make more obscure the well-known "esoteric-exoteric" distinction in folklore.⁹ Briefly, Jansen calls the esoteric the folklore that a group believes about itself and the exoteric what one group thinks about another group. The factors that contribute to esoteric-exoteric analysis, according to Jansen, also illuminate the Gay experience. First, he notes that a group must have a particular (he uses the word peculiar) type of isolation. In the case of Gays, the isolation is social. The second characteristic is the necessity for a specialized knowledge. For Gays, a whole argot and a specialized public/private behavior code is required. Finally, in his schemata, the group must be seen as being as "particularly favored." In the case of Gays (and others) it seems to me, the group needs not so much to be favored but particularly singled out or separated from the larger culture in some extraordinary way. With Gays, the characteristic, obviously, is sexual orientation.

The examples of Dorothy and queer reveal the shift from in group specialized knowledge to recognizable parts of popular culture. What is interesting is the way in which they have shifted shapes, not so much in the meanings of the words themselves, because these lexical meanings have not changed all that much, but rather in the contexts in which

⁹. William Hugh Jansen, "The Esoteric-Exoteric Factor in Folklore," pp. 43-51 in Alan Dundes, ed., The Study of Folklore (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1965).

they are used and the meanings that arise in those contexts. Being a friend of Dorothy still means that someone is Gay, but when and where it is used shifts the borders in the esoteric-exoteric factor. In fact, it shifts it from being a necessary code word among Gays only, to being a signifier of general cultural awareness. The men I interviewed would have never guessed that in the 1990's, Dorothy would be used in a New Yorker article in the sense they used it or that a group of Gays would incorporate the word queer to comment ironically on their self-definition and the role they play in the social order.

The closet, then, and its meanings get elucidated by Gay men in the folk usage of terms appropriated to mark the borders of "us and them." The questions raised in the Mattachine Newsletter about the origins of the terms are not the only illuminating ones. How these terms elaborate the closet in men's consciousness in revealing their attitudes about the structure of their lives as Gay is key. It is possible to get a better sense of what being in, or, being out of, the closet means, in the flux of forty years of shifting meanings, more clearly by listening to them, than by any other method. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's Epistemology of the Closet is the most thorough analysis of the phenomenon of the closet and though the book emerges from the world of literary criticism, she, too, recognizes its instability. She notes that issues surrounding the dichotomy between

homosexuality and heterosexuality are in fluid structures over time and that different models coexist. The project of her book is "to show how issues of modern homo/heterosexual definition are structured, not by the supersession of one model and the consequent withering away of another, but instead by the relations enabled by the unrationalized coexistence of different models during the times they do exist."¹⁰

Another suggestion I would make about the continuity of the role of the closet and potential axis for analysis would be speech act theory. "Coming out" may be seen as a performative in J.L. Austin's sense and even if other contextual meanings shift, when someone has said, "I came out..." there is a way in which the act itself is synonymous with the words.¹¹ Here, I am being only provocative but it seems to me that a profitable line of analysis could be pursued. It would be necessary to determine exactly what was

¹⁰. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), p. 47. Though I have obliquely suggested elsewhere some of the flaws of literary critics doing work in Gay or queer studies one that needs to be explicit here is that they are often so removed from the reality of many lives that their theories become exercises in debates with one another rather than illuminations of the human experience. It seems to me that they would profit from talking to some of the men I spoke with. I admit, however, that her point here is well taken and that it helped me understand the multi-locality of the closet as the men I spoke with explained it.

¹¹. His How to do Things with Words (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975) is fecund in this regard. See especially pp. 133-147 on performatives. His book is very suggestive for queer experience and the verbal art that it creates.

meant by the act of coming out by the speaker, and in some cases, since the locution exists, to determine the distinction(s) between "I came out" and "I officially came out."

The other great indicator of change and continuity for Gay men is tied inevitably to their gender. It revolves around ideas of femininity, masculinity, and attractiveness in each other. This indicator could not be more important. After all, we are examining a group whose main component of self-definition is based on sexual attraction. We know very little about Gay men's attitudes regarding these issues in the present, let alone the past. Folklore, again, provides the best media for understanding the shifts and continuity about them even if, I admit, the data I discovered is not as conclusive as it might be.

For example, many men admitted they did not want to be known as Gay or seen with people who were obviously Gay, except to other Gays. Yet they communicated that they were. As I pointed out elsewhere, I commonly asked, "how did people know others were Gay?" One man responded, "the same way you know now, you look at them."¹² When asked to

¹². One of the rhetorical positions among some Gays is that it is impossible to tell Gays apart from straights. The position is meant to suggest that Gays are just like everyone else, hence "normal." See, for example, Donald Webster Cory [Edward Sagarin], "Can Homosexuals be Recognized?," ONE Magazine 1 (September 1953), pp. 7-11. If it were the case that homosexuals could be recognized, what would be the point of all the devices described here?

elaborate on his answer he discussed the various ways in which Gay men might be seen as feminine, thereby betraying their male bodies. These included stereotyped speech, or dress as I presented these characteristics in the previous chapters.

But even in bars, some Gays displayed an ambivalence about gender roles. To be sure, most drank the martinis emblematic of the period. Others, however, distinctly remembered what were seen as more feminine drinks of the era. These included such elaborate concoctions as a Brandy Alexander or a Pink Squirrel.¹³ These, too, serve as an indicator of a shift in sensibilities. It is difficult to imagine any Gay man ordering such a drink in a bar today, let alone finding a Gay bartender who could make one. Today's elaborate mixed drinks would not be as mild as these but would rather be intended to pack a powerful alcohol punch. Gender analysis illumines these drink choices--the older ones would be seen (and were) as feminine and dainty while today's drinks (Long Island Ice Tea, for example) are manly, jockish even.¹⁴

One man referring to the ways in which people acted camp years ago, pointed out that "no real woman ever acted

¹³. One former bartender described a Pink Squirrel as being composed of crème de almond, crème de cocoa and cream.

¹⁴. A Long Island Ice Tea is meant to pack a powerful punch: 1/2 shot each of vodka, gin, rum, tequilla, and triple sec with a couple of sweet and sour shots to kill the taste thus making the drink taste like ice tea.

that way." It was all done, in his mind, to communicate a particular way of being, that was not in the category of straight women or straight man, but something else entirely. He also believed that the ability to act in this way was a lost art, more or less, and that though campy behavior might exist today it is not what it was. The change, it seems, is in the attitude toward it and its necessity.¹⁵

Many believe that role playing was more important then than it is now. Who was playing the so-called role of the man in the relationship seemed to matter. What was meant by "the man" remains open to question, in my mind, since it seems obvious to me that both were men, at least biologically. However, to Gay men, of that era, with no clearly defined roles to look toward, evidently, they saw the only possible roles as being that of husband and wife on the pattern established by heterosexual marriage. The better person was usually thought to be the one playing the man because being masculine was seen as valuable.

Men who were seen as masculine were considered more appealing sexual partners to most. It was common in the interviews I conducted for the men to respond to questions on this topic to be very harsh about "wanting a real man." It was very important for many of them to find partners they

¹⁵. Wayne Gagnon, "Reframing Drag," Central Park, no. 24(1995), pp. 213-220.

thought butch.¹⁶ If butchness was sought after, for middle class Gays, it had better not be too blatant. Though tight pants were considered sexy, it was also bad form or lower class "to show too much basket," meaning emphasizing one's genitals. It is still important for many Gay men to be seen as masculine or not Gay at all. All one has to do to find evidence of this insight is to examine the personal sections of any Gay newspaper. They are full of men seeking men who are hoped to be "straight acting" or "straight appearing." One could argue about the psychological makeup of such individuals. Nevertheless, there is still a great need among many Gay men to appear to not fit some self- or other-constructed stereotype of being Gay. And if masculinity still needs to be demonstrated, there is also a concurrent need not to be perceived as being the one who is penetrated in anal sex, whether or not it is true. This was true in the 1950's and it is true today that many Gay men are still ambivalent about the roles played in this sexual act.¹⁷

¹⁶. See "Butch," by Wayne Dynes, Homolexis: a Historical and Cultural Lexicon of Homosexuality (New York: The Gay Academic Union, 1985), p. 24. Dynes sees the butch man as passing as straight as opposed to the fem one who is obvious. I think butchness might be read as Gay depending on how knowledgeable the person is who is doing the viewing.

¹⁷. One man I know noted ironically that there is no such thing as a "true top" meaning someone who always likes to do the penetrating. Obviously, this is not the case, but many Gays find this issue difficult to talk about and the wording of the discussion has shifted to today's dichotomy of top and bottom as opposed to active/passive or man/woman. On contemporary anxiety, see Robrt [spelling noted] L. Pela, "Bottom Notes," no. 30, Genre (July-August 1995), pp. 45-46.

If masculinity is still a source of conflict, curiously, the kinds of looks considered attractive were similar to those Gay men find appealing today. "Cute is always cute, cute is as cute does." The term cute for Gay men mostly means good looking. It was said by one man that graduated from Harvard in 1959 that he did not remember men in his youth using that word in that way. However, I interviewed a Pennsylvania man who graduated ten years earlier who distinctly remembers its use. For a source of information about what was considered handsome, I was referred to body building magazines of the era, which are easily seen as the forerunner to today's Gay soft-core pornography. Other than some of the accoutrements, it is difficult, it seems to me, to see much difference in the men who are idealized in these two eras of publication.¹⁸

Life for Gay people, on the whole; though, is considered better. This point was brought home by a man who related two stories about the murder of two Gay men forty

Walt Odets makes some very interesting observations on the idea of sodomy being "ordinary sex" for Gay men and the ramifications of participating in it in the "age of AIDS." see his In the Shadow of the Epidemic: Being HIV-Negative in the Age of AIDS (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995), pp. 189-193.

¹⁸. F. Valentine Hooven, III, Beefcake: the Muscle Magazines of America, 1950-1970 (Köln: Benedikt Taschen, 1995) provides reproductions of many photos that are relevant. Though hair length might change some, especially in the late 1960's and 1970's, the models employed today bear an uncanny resemblance to those from the 50's in Hooven's book.

years apart. He remembered years ago the time three marines beat up a Gay boy and killed him with a rolling pin. Evidently, the boy was just seventeen years old, thin, and not very strong. When the criminals were arraigned, the judge recognized the absurdity of the situation. My informant quoted the judge as having said, "you mean to tell me that you three tough marines could not fight off the advances of a skinny kid." Later, the courts let the marines go. It was a time of "open season on Gays" when any straight man could easily get away with murder, literally, by using the defense that a Gay man came on to him. The contrasting story from the nineties involved the murder of a Gay man by two straight men. It was the first time, my informant thought, that straight men did not get away with murder. My informant was pleased that these men were sentenced to prison though he noted with bitterness that the wife of one of them said, referring to the dead man, "who cares, he's only a faggot." He noted the change in times by said "the point is that [now] you can sue city hall."

Yet if people were glad that times had changed in some respects they could also be nostalgic. "These were days when nobody hurt you. Everybody was having a good time." One man reflecting on the people he knew, the bar performers, from the fifties recalled that there are not people like that in the nineties. "And that is not like old fuddy duddy, like 'those were the good old days,' it really isn't. There were

personalities that don't exist today."¹⁹ He attributes this creativity in part to the fact that there were no drugs then, and what drugs existed were so far underground as to be completely hidden from most people's lives.²⁰ This comment on drugs suggests an important change since the Gay life of much of the late 1970's and early 1980's was typified by a world of discos where drug taking was common. The people were "personalities not merely just characters." Gay performers existed then who were interesting people, and everybody knew them because the Gay community was so small.

Many also found it much more naive, much gentler. They also found it much more social than sexual. The contrast was made between a world of parties which they knew as young men, and a world of bars and back room sex clubs which they see as being the Gay world young men enter today. It cannot be overemphasized that parties were far more important venues for socialization in that era than they are today. While friends met in bars, it was also important for people to connect to a circle that put them into the party scene. Bars might be the location of initial entry, but it was important to make this connection if someone wanted to find

¹⁹. This is the same man who talked about Francis Renault in chapter 5 and described the Gay wedding in Chapter 6. He has a delightful story telling ability and is a keen observer of Gay life.

²⁰. There must have been some intersection with the drug world though. Branson notes that one her regulars sold marijuana, to her horror. See Gay Bar, p. 46.

a Gay social outlet.

Nevertheless, AIDS weighs heavily on the minds of many of these older Gay men. Many have spent a large part of their retirement time serving in AIDS organizations.²¹ All have thought about its ramifications and the way it has devastated their friends and the world they once knew. One common comment was that AIDS did bond Gay people together, some thought for the first time. It is also irrevocably part of people's consciousness for contextualizing meaning in Gay life. One member of a pair of lovers I interviewed told the story about seeing two young men engaging in sodomy in the stacks of the library in the university he attended forty years ago. The other lover asked, "were they using a condom?" Of course, his question was really a comment on the necessary protection against AIDS today, rather than sexual behavior in the forties.

Then as now Gays still form a transient community and though it might be difficult to prove statistically, I think it could be demonstrated that today's Gays are even more mobile than the average household. It certainly was the case forty years ago that if you found your hometown too oppressive, you simply left it. It was also taken for granted by Gay men that one of the benefits of Gay life was

²¹. Nearly all have volunteered in AIDS organization, some have served on their boards. Astonishingly, Boston has a sewing circle for people with AIDS titled "stitch and bitch," the same name as the club from forty years ago in Philadelphia. See Out, no. 23, June 1995, p. 24

that you could take off when you wanted to, if "you were young enough or confident enough." Most of the men I interviewed, in fact, did just that and not only when they were young and confident, but also when they were middle aged and thought themselves jaded.

Another axis of continuity is in the confidence that Gay life can be found wherever one goes. Perhaps this confidence for these older men is born of years of experience of finding it. "Just like it is nowadays, every city there is always a spot where some kind of activity is going on." The difference today might be that there are published guides to Gay spots covering everything from bars and organizations to popular cruising spots and t-rooms--rest rooms where men met for casual sex. In the past, men had to rely almost exclusively on oral guidance and informally published materials.

These men have seen tremendous changes throughout their lifetime in the ways in which Gays have been treated. Several noted the disjuncture that the sixties brought in sexual mores. "Things started relaxing during the sixties with the flower children." The man who made that statement went on to justify it by pointing out that Gays were only part of a larger shift in society that made it possible for people of all kinds to unload the hypocrisy and stifling values that had characterized the fifties. The sense of optimism is tempered by a realistic sense of how difficult

it was to cope with oppression.

This oppression runs through all their lives and manifests itself as a kind of melancholy about the restrictions and limits placed on them. "What we were trying to do was enjoy our sex, our friends and keep our jobs." "It takes a lot of courage to live a Gay life; it is a very stressful thing."²² To recognize these difficulties, to survive them, and to display the incredible creativity I have documented in the face of them does indeed require courage. It also requires a communal genius for survival techniques that cannot be overestimated.

The Gays of today owe them more than mere gratitude. What is needed, I think, is community recognition of the reality that the Gay world's very existence is predicated on the ways in which these men carved out a niche for themselves in terrible times. When I have told people about this project, both straight and Gay, I have been met with both incredulity and awe. Occasionally, I have met with resentment of these men by younger Gays on the issue of masculinity. Some think that the older men were not good role models since they are perceived as too feminine. One

²². Another man said, "Better white, than black; better man, than woman; better rich, than poor; better straight than Gay" to indicate his sense of how privilege works in our society. One of the saddest indications of the way in which self-loathing was so deeply inculcated is the statement by one of the older men in A History of Shadows by Robert C. Reinhart (Boston: Alyson, 1986). He says, "What fool would choose to be gay." (p.73)

younger man could see no place for him in a Gay world inhabited by people who were interested in Judy Garland and musicals. These perceptions are sadly mistaken and undoubtedly reveal more about the individual's psyche than historical ethos. For if Gays are diverse now, they definitely were then, as I hope I have shown in this chapter and the previous two.

CHAPTER 8: THE CIRCLE ALMOST CIRCLED

"Look off the shores of my Western sea, the circle almost circled..."

--Walt Whitman, Leaves of Grass, "Children of Adam"; "Facing West from California's Shores," 4

The only truly serious questions are ones that even a child can formulate. Only the most naive of questions are truly serious. They are the questions with no answers. A question with no answers is a barrier that cannot be breached. In other words, it is questions with no answers that set the limits of human possibilities, describe the boundaries of human existence.

--Milan Kundera, The Unbearable Lightness of Being, p. 139

Questions of identity and folklore beg to be answered. In the first chapter, the goal I set forth was to use life histories of older Gay men to access the folklore of Gay life in the 1940's and 50's with the practical hope of better understanding the tenor of the times and the more theoretical issue of the relationship between folklore and identity. The basis of the practical was the notion that life histories could be used to get at folklore. Though there were earlier precedents, the idea of talking to Gay men with that explicit purpose seemed novel. On the whole, I would say the goal was met. Much interesting data come from the interviews. I could have only wished to keep interviewing forever, frankly. It was the most interesting (and dare I admit it, fun) part of the process.

The theoretical issues have been more difficult, especially as identity comes into play. It was clear that all of the men I talked to "identified" as being Gay, some even explicitly used that word. What they meant by it and

how they enacted it in their folklore remains to be grappled with. I want to wrestle a bit more with that problem in this final chapter and also use what I did accomplish as a springboard of suggestions for more work in the future. Similarly, I want to elevate, beyond clichés, other contributions the group I studied might make. Concluding, I will look at what Gay or queer studies have to say about folklore and folklore about them.

Identity was left in chapter 1 with two primary points having been made: 1) that identity, particular Gay identity, exists in group construction and relations, and 2) the self-naming was essential to the process of this formation. In folklore recently, as in other disciplines, identity has come to the fore. Oring's 1993 American Folklore Society Fellows lecture is overkill in its re-reading of the history of folklore scholarship through the filter of the idea of identity. The lecture consequentially leads to an unnecessary and inaccurate overemphasis of the concept's role in the discipline's development.¹ I begin with it, nonetheless, since it usefully engages some of the ideas I set out to explore. The rejoinders by Glassie and Kirschenblatt-Gimblett take his argument apart on two key parameters. Glassie's point that many peoples out there in

¹. Eliot Oring, "The Arts, Artifacts, and Artifices of Identity," with discussion by Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, Henry Glassie, and Eliot Oring, *JAF*, 107(1994), pp. 211-247.

"the field" do not even think about the issue is right, but entirely too facile. He says these people, the ones he has studied, know who they are, so they do not need to think about such a big question as "who am I?" Kirschenblatt-Gimblett is on target by noting that Oring's use of the term ignores the political, and prioritizes the psychological. Glassie ignores the reality that any thinking person is going to ask themselves those famous questions of Western philosophy (who am I? where am I going?) no matter what their place is on the world economic development chart. It does not really matter whether or not they think of answer to these questions when they use the word "identity," because for academics in the late twentieth century, has become a handle to play around with to encourage further understanding.

Kirschenblatt-Gimblett is on to something, on the other hand. The nature of identity and its role in the greater cultural and political sphere might well be the way to make clear some truths, to make sense of the issues I have raised and the data I encountered.

What is going on with these men as they enact their Gayness, though most of them would not see it explicitly this way, is engaged resistance. Resistance is inherently political since some element of power is the buffer; folklore and its creative, connecting ability provides certain engagement for people. However, what is being

resisted is not always precisely clear, since often more than one cultural and hegemonic foil is being resisted simultaneously, and these foils confusingly, continually shift.

Some examples provide clarity. A group of men in their twenties get together in the early 1950's and call each other by the diminutive form of their mother's names. The 1950's environment was one of strict gender conformity and idealization of nuclear family structure. First, it takes imagination to even think of the idea of calling a friend named Bob, "Josie." It requires insightful social skills among a disparate group of individuals to put together a circle of friends who will find such nicknaming funny even, let alone acceptable for performance. By doing so, they did not only symbolically resist the gender restrictions of their era and use the nicknames for the purposes of group bonding, they for a brief moment (interval?) allowed a new social order to emerge, an order where gender and class restrictions of their era were left behind. By making fun of the old order and playing with its gender restrictive naming practices they made way for being Gay to emerge.

It's an evening in the late spring in 1954. In Philadelphia's Rittenhouse Square, a very public place and one associated with the city's social elite at that, a couple of friends meet and sit on the wall in the center. How do they dress? What do they talk about? What jokes do

they tell? What personal experiences do they relate to one another? Many dress differently than most of the people around them, some flamboyantly so, with dyed hair. The experiences they relate to one another and the places they talk about are either unintelligible to passers by since they invoke code words and argot that is used by them with unique meanings or more dangerously would reveal that they engage in illegal activity. In 1954, virtually everywhere in the United States, homosexual activity itself was illegal and in many places homosexuals were not allowed to congregate in public or private. It was necessary, then, to share information, about meeting men illicitly in movie houses and other useful information, efficiently yet clandestinely, under the noses of the police and others who could potentially wreck your life.

All of this activity is done vacillating back and forth on the fine line between being public and private. (The fact that in Rittenhouse Square, much learning did take place on a wall, a fixture of precarious balance, seems fitting.) Some by temperament are more public, wearing gold ascots; while others, more circumspect, wear the clothes they might while working in a bank. The obvious point is that each, in his own way, resists the legal system and the normative cultural mores of the era.

Identity in this way is performed symbolically and practically. The role of folklore, then, in accomplishing an

identity in Gay culture is essential on two fronts: the personal, since knowledge of it is required to operate within the Gay world, and understand the boundary between the Gay and straight worlds, and politically, because the identity can only be taken on, if the person, even if unwittingly, is willing to demonstrate that he will not conform.

One last note on the politics of Gay performance makes clearer the role folklore scholarship might play in furthering the understanding the role of folklore in culture generally, and in the academy. Peggy Phelan's Unmarked: the Politics of Performance is a brilliant analysis of the way in which performances are engaged, provoking various kinds of resistance.² She looks at phenomena as diverse as "Paris is Burning" and Operation Rescue, the anti-abortion rights activists. In each case she provides, whether it is Guerilla Girls or Act-UP, however, she is really writing about organized groups--ones that have schedules, appointments, determined activities. It seems to me that these are merely more visible versions of resistance and that it is more important to look at how people resist all the time, not just in institutions, deliberately created, (alternative theaters, etc.) that are marginalized. The men I talked to did, in fact, resist all the time without the self-consciousness of, say, Robert Mapplethorpe.

². (New York: Routledge, 1993).

Nevertheless, Phelan is on to the ways in which folklore plays its own role in identity formation in the nexus of the personal and communal, the political and the social. What comes to mind is the fact that a group such as "stitch and bitch" consists of individuals who come and go but when a particular individual attends, he brings with him a set of understandings about Gay representations that may or may not contribute to the whole. Over time, the individual's sense of himself as Gay changes in accordance with the performances allowed by the group and he also contributes to the mix. The result is that both individual identity and group identity are being created. It is clear then that there is no fixed identity for either the small group, "stitch and bitch," or the individual members of it. The identity as performed in folklore continually accommodates the flux of personalities and the internal flux of each individual's personality.

By extension, the same may be said of the folklore of the entire Gay community. What seems clear on the small group level, such as "stitch and bitch," is less clear on such a large notion as the Gay community, since the influences on such a larger whole are so much more diverse and less definable. (After all, the group "stitch and bitch" can easily determine who will join, while no one can demonstrate that a person who says he is a member of "the" Gay community is not.) But the measurement of the person's

relationship to some kind of normative membership in the Gay community may be seen in the person's ability to perform folklorically or explicate, or merely comprehend, the folklore.

Politically, I would argue, these small groups are very potent. They may have the character of "stitch and bitch" which met on a schedule or, less rigidly, are only a group of men going out as a group to dance on a Saturday night. A particular assemblage may be put together in that formation only once. In both examples, however, by coming together, there is resistance to the hegemonic heterosexual norms. In the process of forming even these small groups, Gay men are saying they have the power to create spaces for themselves. In this way, the identity of difference almost all of them acknowledge as young men when they realize they are Gay, is allowed to become communal, often just for a moment. Politically, they may lack the verve of an ACT-UP, but their implication is similar. They, too, are fighting back for themselves.

So if they are fighting back, they are also struggling to create an identity for themselves and those that follow them. It is perhaps in this way that the identity issues I have raised may be resolved.³ Not only are Gay men of the

³. Honestly, at this point in academic analysis, I am not sure much more can be squeezed out of the idea of identity except by looking at it in cases of individuals and their interactions in small groups. I certainly am not smart enough to do so. I think that notions of identity on a

era I looked at, Gay, because they said they were, but also because commonly, together, they created something different with their peers. In that mix, the individual self-definition or identity became part of the blossoming of group identity. Identity, then, becomes a priority in the merging of the self with the group and is predicated on a strong need for association. The man who spoke of this need comes readily to mind. The process of identification takes its rough shape through a continual intuitive process as behavior is appropriated for apprehending identity through experiences. Since most people have a need to organize behavior, the process is oriented through the concretizing process of observing behavior and trying it on as a person learns the rules. In this way, the Gay man is like a folklorist seeking texts.

Another role of thinking about identity, among Gays particularly, might be to see it as a means of producing association rather than role. Since Gays as a group perform their Gayness on the borders of gender roles, their performances can become ones that are meaningful as a way of forming associations on these seams. Accordingly, it becomes the Gay man's choice to minimize or maximize particular arts of social interactions in the performance. It remains to be

larger scale such as "national identity," to use one extreme example, are increasingly ludicrous and say more about a particular person motives than the reality of nation-states in our time.

seen how Gays do interact in multivocal ways since they almost always have other identities to be performed whether based in race, ethnicity or other parameters. What is clear is that Gayness is performed in more self-conscious ways which make it distinct from other identity markers. A Gay man has to reinvent himself as Gay.

Some last questions on the interaction of the individual, the small group and the larger culture might be suggestive. There is an increasing awareness on the part of larger American society of the Gay presence. National magazines have cover stories titled "The Gay Moment," or more insultingly, "The Limits of Tolerance." What has become called "mainstream" culture, in the form of movies, television and popular culture generally, has become very much aware of what one man I talked with called a world that was "suspected, perhaps, but not commonly known." Wayne Gagnon, in a thoughtful article on the mainstreaming of drag, raises interesting questions that apply more generally to issues of how identity is manifested and created.⁴ First he sees Gays trying to develop identity along four potential parameters: pluralistic, democratic, socially conscious and tolerant. Then he asks solid important questions:

Who is mainstreaming lesbian and gay culture? To what purposes? Who benefits? How difficult is it to become mainstream? Does mainstream mean creativity, ownership, empowerment? If a part of the lesbian and gay culture

⁴. Wayne J Gagnon, "Reframing Drag," Central Park, no. 24(Spring 1995), p. 213-220.

becomes mainstream, can it ever be re-claimed, even after it becomes unpopular? Can ideologies and sensibilities go mainstream or only artifacts as products? What happens to the people whose lives are termed "progressive," "fringe," or "alternative," when their lifestyle becomes mass marketed? (p. 220)

These questions get to the heart of the intersection of identity as both a group and individual process as it intersects and might conflict with the larger culture. With Gay culture, it may well be that it is these margins of conflict that allow for the creation of Gay identity to take place. Gagnon notes that no one is going to remember a particular drag queen in a few years, given the nature of popular culture. Rather it is the constant churn, as he puts it, that counts. The sense that something, probably eluding definition forever, is happening.

Something did indeed happen among the men I interviewed and that something was to make a whole new way of being Gay possible. It was clear from the interviews I conducted that folklore played a large role in making that new identity communicable.

Finally, I would like to suggest some ways in which the interviews I conducted might potentially lead to new investigations. These are avenues that tickled my imagination in the midst of my interviews but were outside the realm of the possible in the confines of one dissertation.

It occurred to me that if the esoteric/exoteric factor played an important role in how Gay men themselves set

boundaries, it also would be important to know how non-Gays set the boundaries as well in this era. Interviews might be conducted among them to discover what existed in their minds about Gays and what Gay life was like. I did, in fact, ask on an ad hoc basis, straight people who were contemporaries of the men I talk with, what they knew about Gay life and what their perceptions of Gay culture were. Most had little or no conception that a vast Gay world existed side by side with their own. Some had no idea that Gays existed at all. Some people, who were more urbane, knew about Gay bars but not much more than that. It seems to me that more needs to be known about general awareness of Gay life during the 1940's and 50's to have more data which would allow us to put in larger perspective much of the research that is now taking place.

Another element of the work I have done that needs examination is how performance and politics intertwine in day to day folklore communication. I have already alluded to this need for larger group occasions such as ACT/UP demonstrations and the like. One cogent example here of a group protest effort might be to look further at the ways in which some of the earlier protests that took place at Independence Hall and the White House incorporated folklore. These took place in the early 1960's and were very consciously thought out by their participants. They must have had some folkloric elements to them, however. They

certainly were conscious of self-presentation. However, it is not this kind of political act I am referring to. It seems to me that micro political analysis of other kinds of interactions needs pursuing. What I am thinking of is using political consciousness to get at the sort of detail that Erving Goffman does in Frame Analysis and Forms of Talk.⁵

I have already alluded to how much more work needs to be done on the more public aspects of how Gay life manifests itself politically and fortunately there are people investigating these avenues. From Sydney Mardi Gras to New York's Wigstock, serious research is taking place. It would also be interesting to pursue public manifestations of Gay pride in smaller places such as Asbury Park, Boise and Des Moines. Today, these smaller cities have enough of a visible Gay community to have public Gay events during Gay pride month in June.

It would also be interesting to examine how Gay people functioned in these less populated areas during the era I studied. It was clear to me that there were many satellite communities for the larger cities. In a way, I stumbled upon the phenomenon. By circumstance, I was forced to interview people wherever I found them. One of the consequences of interviewing people all over the country was that patterns emerged that might be overlooked if I had stuck to one

⁵. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974); (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981)

locale. It was clear that no matter where Gay people lived in the United States, large cities, mostly, it seemed, there were also smaller enclaves in the outlying areas. Perhaps they were not enclaves as much as isolated businesses catering to Gay people but probably there were also smaller communities that supported them. Everyone could mention bars and the like that were on rural roads. This was true in New Jersey, Florida, Texas, New York, Ohio and so on. It is unclear whether or not these bars were in more remote settings only for the purposes of remaining unnoticed and to avoid the purview of the police, or because there was a significant enough population to support them close by.

There have been studies of smaller cities such as Buffalo or small summer resorts such as Cherry Grove. What I think is needed differs from these studies by degree. Small cities like the ones I have mentioned must have had some means for Gay people to establish networks. The men I talked with left small towns if that was where they were from. Certainly, not everyone did. I know from my own experience, that Asbury Park, New Jersey, a town of about 20,000 in 1960, had a Gay bar in 1962 (across the street from the police station at that!). What did people do to get together before then? That area of New Jersey was then quite provincial, even remote, even if it was a successful middle

class summer resort.⁶

Another community that has been overlooked for its creative ability is the Gay couple. Folklorists have begun to look at dyadic folklore, though Bendix notes that the study of it is only in its infancy.⁷ The study of Gay couples is also in its infancy and has taken two forms. There are some that look at the psychology of Gay relationships or have a journalistic bent.⁸ Others have a more applied aspect taking the form of self-help manuals.⁹ Clearly, then, there is a need to know more about how Gay couples use folklore in their relationships.¹⁰ The couples I

⁶. A fine example of the kind of communities I am concerned with is discussed in Vern Bullough and Bonnie Bullough, "Lesbianism in the 1920s and 1930s: a New Found Study," Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society 2(1977), pp. 895-904. It describes a manuscript the couple inherited by a Salt Lake City lesbian which describes her circle of friends. Since I have roots there it was of great interest to me that even there individuals found each other and formed networks.

⁷. Regina Bendix, "Marmot, Memet, and Marmoset: Further Research on the Folklore of Dyads," Western Folklore, 46(1987), pp. 171-191.

⁸. David P. McWhirter and Andrew M. Mattison, The Male Couple: How Relationships Develop (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1984) and Charles Silverstein, Man to Man: Gay Couples in America (New York: Quill, 1981).

⁹. Two examples are: Hayden Curry, Denis Clifford and Robin Leonard, A Legal Guide for Lesbian and Gay Couples, 8th edition (Berkeley, CA: Nolo Press, 1994) and Eric Marcus, The Male Couple's Guide: Finding a Man. Making a Home. Building a Life (New York: HarperPerennial, 1992).

¹⁰. Thomas Meyer in the Graduate School of Education at the University of Pennsylvania is working on a dissertation tentatively titled "Language, Gender and Power in Couples: an Ethnographic Discourse Analysis." In it, he looks at how

interviewed or the individuals who were or had been part of long term relationships hinted at the aesthetics that went into their relationships. It would be interesting to see, for example, how each person's past experiences contributed to the process as well. Since many Gay men are not part of a coupled relationship, it is also important that friendships be examined to discover how folklore plays a role there as well. Some have even argued that friendship is the most important kind of Gay relationship so overlooking them seems to miss an essential component of Gay life.

As with some of these other avenues for further research I have hinted at, the study of the relationship between Gay fiction and Gay lives has been suggested in earlier chapters. Because I specifically asked about books that were important to these men, I was able to identify several, most notably Gore Vidal's The City and the Pillar. In several places, I footnoted novels where they corroborated oral evidence I solicited. It is clear that there is rich vein to be investigated here. Some of these fictional works have an ethnographic aspect to them in that they record the world that the writer observed while others are explicitly autobiographical and contribute life history material. But the interaction between books and Gay readers

power is expressed through language, focusing on disagreements. What makes it relevant here is that he compares three lesbian, three Gay and three heterosexual couples to determine if there are any differences.

needs to be better understood. To what extent did the fictional (or non fictional, for that matter) influence how men learned to be Gay? Remember the man who said that he read that Gay men wore green on Thursdays. He did not remember the particular book but reading it helped shape the way in which he formulated being Gay. Folklorists have examined some of the issues involved here, and there has been fieldwork among several groups.¹¹ It would be productive to pursue this line of inquiry among Gays historically.¹²

One final point needs to be put forth for further exploration and it is the most important. Gerontology as a field has usually looked at the aged as a problem, and has been concerned with issues of their health, their economic position and their marginalization within society. Yet much is easily said about how the aged can contribute to our understanding of the past and of life in community. I have suggested some of these ways in chapter one by looking at works by Barbara Myerhoff and Patrick Mullen. More recently David Shuldiner's program with the Connecticut Humanities

¹¹. Sandra Dolby Stahl, Literary Folkloristics and the Personal Narrative (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989); Bruce A. Rosenberg, Folklore and Literature: Rival Siblings (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1991).

¹². Jimmy D. Browning, "'The Lost Tribalism of Years Gone By:' Function and Variation in Gay Folklore in Armistead Maupin's Tales of the City Novels," Thesis. Western Kentucky University, 1992. Browning looks at a very popular series of Gay novels from the 1980's.

Council sought to develop a program within the framework of a state agency whereby a folklorist would be an active participant in an educational enrichment program with older people.¹³ What is clearer to me now than ever before is that older Gay men have a tremendous contribution to make especially to their own community and additionally to provide a more accurate sense of history to the larger culture as well. Reducing the elderly to images of cuteness and helplessness is common and an enormous mistake. They are extraordinarily powerful and strong. Though I have my doubts, I still hope that Gays can work against the prevalent ageism in the community and start to look to the aged as a vital resource of culture and leadership.

It is important to remember to focus not only on the social services that older Gays might need, but to devise strategies for incorporating them in the community or empower them to create their own. Though "Stitch and Bitch" began when the men involved were younger, it is notable that they continued to work together on projects until they were in their seventies. This example demonstrates the ability of the Gay aged to take care of their own needs, both social

¹³. "Promoting Self-Worth Among the Aging," pp. 214-225 in Putting Folklore to Use, Michael Owen Jones, ed. (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1994). A recent survey on the Gay aged which unfortunately takes the problem approach is James D. Read, "Development in Late Life: Older Lesbian and Gay Lives," pp. 215-240 in Anthony R. D'Augelli and Charlotte J. Patterson, Lesbian Gay and Bisexual Identities over the Lifespan: Psychological Perspectives (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

and practical. Furthermore, it was accomplished without any intervention by outsiders which can often be condescending even with the best intentions. Reciprocity is achieved through empirical research in a nurturing way. Folklorists who have done field work have known all along that learning takes place in both directions. The folklorist who listens to others, learns about the ways in which people empower themselves and in my work older Gays were more than glad to teach me. They were also flattered to have me listen and learn that they were part of something larger than their individual experience.¹⁴

Another important way in which older Gay men can take the initiative is what might be called for lack of a better term "mentoring." What is implied by such an action is that older Gays can demonstrate their own power in the broader Gay community by becoming visible, forcibly, if necessary. Younger Gays, sadly, typically are dismissive of older ones, for example, referring to bars where older Gays congregate as "wrinkle rooms." Though they may face rejection from their own, it would be important for older Gays to take the leadership not only for their own self-esteem but also to make clear the generational continuity in the community, a reality that usually gets lost. Two examples from my

¹⁴. Patti Lather's "Research as Praxis," Harvard Educational Review, 56(1986), pp. 257-277 argues for a rigorous self-reflexivity that incorporates, rather than merely acknowledges, the reciprocity involved in research.

observations demonstrate that such integration is possible. Most of the Gay religious organizations, such as Dignity for Roman Catholics and the Metropolitan Community Church, which is Gay oriented evangelical denomination, have easily integrated Gays of all ages without much fanfare. Studying how this was accomplished would be valuable for the entire Gay society. The other comes from the twelve step programs. In both examples a strong spiritual need obviates the usual age separation that is more common in the Gay community.

Gerontologists, too, have to begin to change their focus when they study the aged. Though many gerontologists are culturally sensitive, older Gays need to become part of the focus of study. Clearly, not all older people are straight or have belonged to heterosexual families. Increasingly, the gerontological curriculum is recognizing that reality, and that trajectory needs to continue.

A more academic issue is the relevance of folklore to Gay studies. But first, I want to cite two recent articles in which the case is made on behalf of Gay studies and Queer theory, each representing two different strands of thought increasingly commonplace in today's academy. Will Roscoe, a prominent anthropologist, critiques his discipline, focusing on how anthropologists have made two major errors in the study of Native Americans.¹⁵ One he calls homoasentia, the

¹⁵. "Strange Craft, Strange History, Strange Folks: Cultural Amnesia and the Case For Lesbian and Gay Studies," American Anthropologist 97(1995), pp. 448-453.

other homoamnesia. Both neologisms are obvious in their meaning. For the first, he gives Lévi-Strauss as an example, pointing out how he ignored the blending of genders in his interpretation of Zuni myth and in Brazil. Lévi-Strauss was too relentless, Roscoe argues, in his pursuit of binary oppositions to realize that mythical characters with mixed gender identities are more than a mere "mediating device" in a natural order of binaries, they are central to understanding how the social system works. The amnesia factor occurs in the study of the earliest contacts of Europeans with the Americans. Historians, almost deliberately, according to Roscoe, ignore the reality that sodomy was a key behavior. Ignoring it misses any understanding of these first encounters. More particularly, coming to grips with the Europeans view of sodomy among the aborigines makes clearer the justifications Europeans made for genocide. He concludes:

What is at stake is not "political correctness," or "celebrating the lesbian and gay life style," or "victim studies," or "white male bashing." What is at stake is and always has been the integrity of the Western tradition of scholarship, whether the studies that historians and anthropologists produce under the auspices of the academy are objective, thorough, accurate, balanced, rigorous, and complete--in a word, scholarly--and whether they can be so as long as subjects like homosexuality, homosexual persons, and homophobia are systematically excluded. (p.452)

In folklore, too, I would argue, that these gaps lead us to "seeing through a glass dimly." Any critique of the aesthetic dimension of life that ignores these dimensions

will be blatantly partial.

In an editorial by Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner in PMLA titled "What Does Queer Theory Tell Us about X?" the perspective is different from Roscoe's.¹⁶ They are self-consciously examining the currents of thought taking place in the academy making queer studies "hot" as they put it. But they would rather not see "queer theory" become a thing as other theoretical perspectives have but rather a destabilizing force, one that cultivates a "generous critical culture without narrowing its field." (p. 344) After taking on some of queer theory's critics, for example those who dismiss queer studies as mere examination of lifestyle (noting that lifestyles do indeed have the capacity to change the world), they conclude that the answer to their titular question is "culture building should be the baseline issue for humanists." (p. 348)

Much of what Berlant and Warner write is so. There is more than a tendency to marginalize sexual minorities in an attempt to dismiss them. The need to examine their experience to cast light on the whole human experience is clear. To see the whole means that "queer commentary" must

¹⁶. PMLA: Publications of the Modern Language Society, 110(1995), pp. 343-349. Though I use the word "queer" myself, I admit that the men I spoke with have made me more sensitive to the fact that many homosexual men find it deeply offensive. Lest anyone think that offense is taken only by older men, I would tell them about the young man I met recently who was taunted by his junior high classmates as "queer boy." The word understandably haunts him.

demonstrate "that much of what passes for general culture is riddled with heteronormativity." (p. 349)

There are two aspects of their critique which fascinate me as a folklorist. The first is realized by the interviews I conducted and I have touch on it earlier. Though none of the men I talked to were comfortable with the word "queer," all of them knew that they were not operating as part of the general culture. They sensed this reality when they thought and talked about their lives and provided commentary on them, and when they were in contexts where they could act more explicitly. Each man acted being Gay according to his own way. The point I am making here is that the older Gay men knew instinctively what Berlant and Warner are getting at, though they would not use the "hot" terms of theory. Folklorists make their major contribution to understanding culture by being good listeners. People want to teach. Most academics would profit from listening. Rightly, Berlant and Warner criticize the academy for ignoring the issue of power when examining cultural display. Yet people are stronger than the academy's issues. They have their own sense of power and do display their creativity.

The second point I want to make is more trivial and related more to the history of intellectual disciplines. Succinctly put, folklorists have known all along that culture building is the humanist's task. It is almost the creed of those of us who are privileged to be folklorists

that culture building is essential to our endeavor (and I would argue that any of us who have jobs in higher education are very privileged in the sense that we have more material benefits than are our fair due and in the sense that we are lucky to have jobs that, after all, allow us to study what we want to study rather than what in a broader perspective might be considered what needs to be studied).

The history of folklore is replete with examples of men and women who were culture builders. Even if they are viewed as shadows of romantic nationalism, from today's perspective, Elias Lonnrot and Michael Agricola had the goal of building a communal consciousness among the Finns. In our century, similar motives underlay the scholarship and professional endeavors of people with diverse academic backgrounds and training. Ben Botkin, Ruth Benedict and Vance Randolph clearly were motivated by similar goals. This point is not mere boosting for the discipline of folklore, but rather to suggest that folklore itself has more to say about the nature of humanity than whatever trends are current in academia. It cannot be emphasized enough that the Gay men I spoke with knew more than any theoretical perspective I might bring to the interaction.

What folklore does for more people than any other form of aesthetic creation is to lead them to what William A.

Wilson calls the "deeper necessity" of human existence.¹⁷ The task humans face as he sees it is to create "order, beauty and meaning of chaos." I would argue that these Gay men of advanced years knew how to do that quite well. But they also knew that there was disorder, ugliness and meaninglessness in much of human existence. They had to live with the constant conflicts that these characteristics create, and live with the dissonance. Folklore more than any other medium made that day-to-day reality bearable. Ever optimistic, Wilson concludes "we must never fail to recognize and honor all the artistic murmurings of that heart; we must see it as equally important and equally inspiring in all ages, past and present; and we must hear its beating in all places, among all cultures." (p. 166) I would add that we must hear it sometimes in the most unlikely places, in voices obscured by the din of advanced commercialized culture and among those demonstrating their strength against forces of marginalization.

Folklore and Gay studies, then, can profitably learn from one another. Clear, obvious examples come in both directions: folklore can teach students of Gay life to be better listeners and Gay studies can teach folklorists to see how power structures struggle against one another in advanced technological societies. For those in Gay studies,

¹⁷. "The Deeper Necessity: Folklore and the Humanities," JAF, 101(1988), pp. 156-167.

the folklorist's lesson can lead away from focusing primarily on cultural forms that are created by elites, even if they are elites of the margin. For folklorists, the lesson in Gay studies is to recognize that the romanticism to which they are prone (and I confess to being enamored by) usually produces a denial of the harsh reality that in any cultural analysis, conflict and the necessity for negotiation are always present.

The affirmation of these timeless qualities was the only answer of human personality to war. In a word, it was--survival. It answered that side of humanity which has produced the war with the indestructibility of this other side--human love.

Lest it be objected that war is infinitely destructive and human love infinitely destructible, I repeat what I have said before: the inner life of man must create his outward circumstances.

...Although we should support every outward movement for attaining peace and social improvement, it is only within the inner life that man can will himself to be a coherent whole and not a part set against another part.

--Stephen Spender, World Within World, pp.259-260

And what the dead had no speech for, when living,
They can tell you, being dead: the communication
Of the dead is tongued with fire beyond the language of the
living.

Here, the intersection of the timeless moment
Is England and nowhere. Never and always.

--T.S. Eliot, "Little Gidding," 1:3:11-15

In the midst of World War II, the foregrounding of the deepest necessity of humanity became imperative. What Spender meant by timeless quality was a revival of interest in the arts. Writing several years after the war, he

remembered vividly, with regret even, how compelled everyone became by music and the other arts. War made the need for enriching the human soul clearer and more focused. At the beginning of the second decade of the AIDS epidemic, the need is felt by Gay men. Folklore and the artistic elements of everyday life were spoken of by the men I talked to with the same urgency. To be sure, I solicited the topics, but I was astonished at how important they felt the memories were. I know that in their minds the concern had as much to do with their age and the fact that they were facing the end of their lives. But for me, and sometimes for them, AIDS made the need to tell the tale a life-saving cure.

Eliot's "Little Gidding" is an elegy to the importance of remembering the past when standing on the precipice of the possible destruction of his beloved England. In what has already become known as the "Age of AIDS," I want to elevate the importance of standing on the brink, looking forward and looking backward. I want the tongue of fire to be now, here and always. It can also be nowhere and never. We must not let that happen.

Folklorists know the importance of keeping memories alive, and the witness folklore brings to human experience. One folklorist writes,

folklore stands against alienation, alienation of the kind that separates a worker from his product, a speaker from his language. Saying that, we express one of our discipline's traditional values. Folklorists are appalled by alienation, by that which prevents people from preserving active control over their creative

energies.¹⁸

I can think of no other community where alienation from society rears its ugly head more than the Gay community. More there than anywhere, does the need for releasing creative energy arise, and arising, gives people control over their lives.

James Barr, the pseudonymous author of several Gay novels in the fifties, knew that it might take "time or a vicious persecution" to create a distinct Gay identity.¹⁹ He was speaking of Gay politics primarily. Yet what took place, though he himself had doubts that it would, was a new creation of a strong Gay culture that met obstacles of government harassment, social stigmatization and now, a war defined by disease. It took place all around him, and all around his fellow citizens with little notice at the time, and is only now becoming recognizable. But like Spender's World War II National Gallery concert goers, it was survival itself and more.

¹⁸. Henry Glassie, "The Moral Lore of Folklore," Folklore Forum, 16(1983), p. 130.

¹⁹. Quoted in Quatrefoil, p. 375.

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